*Jawaharlal Nehru*

# EIGHTEEN MONTHS *IN* INDIA

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S. VR. Veerappa.
6/6/38.

C. Chidambaram

# EIGHTEEN MONTHS IN INDIA

*By the Same Author*

Letters from a Father to his Daughter.
Glimpses of World History—2 Vols.
Whither India?
A Window in Prison and Prison-land.
Recent Essays.
Autobiography.
India and the World.

# Eighteen Months in India
## 1936 - 1937

BEING FURTHER ESSAYS AND WRITINGS

*By*

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# PREFACE

The title given to this collection of odd essays and statements is apt to mislead. This book is not a history of the past eighteen months in India, nor is it the story of a tourist's visit to India. In March 1936 I returned from Europe and ever since then I have functioned on the public stage as President of the National Congress. This period has been an eventful one in the ever changing drama of Indian politics, and perforce I have had to play a prominent part in it. In a sense it has been a new phase in the development of our national movement for freedom. New ideas have spread, new hopes have arisen, new conflicts and difficulties have had to be faced, new problems require solution. A history of this brief period would be worthwhile, but we shall have to wait for that. Meanwhile it might serve some little purpose to collect the material for this study, and it was with this end in view that it was decided to publish this scrappy collection of essays of varying merit and importance. It does not pretend to be anything more than my personal reactions to certain happenings and tendencies. But perhaps even this may help somewhat in understanding the India of today and her manifold problems.

These problems are no longer merely her domestic concern. More and more they are becoming parts of the world problems that are agitating humanity today, and India is be-

coming increasingly conscious of this fact. And that is the reason why events in Spain and Palestine and China have stirred the people of India so deeply.

ALLAHABAD
*January 1938*

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

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# 1

## IN A TRAIN*

Friends often ask me: When do you read? My life seems pretty full of various activities, some useful perhaps, others of a doubtful utility. It is not easy to make friends with books and live in their charmed world when the horrid business of politics consumes our youth and eats up our days and nights which, under a better dispensation, would be given to happier pursuits. Yet even in this dreary round I try to find a little time at night to read some book that is far removed from politics. I do not succeed always. But most of my reading takes place in railway trains as I journey to and fro across this vast land.

A third class or an intermediate class compartment is not an ideal place to read in or do any work. But the invariable friendliness of my fellow-travellers and the courtesy of railway officials make a difference and I am afraid I cannot pretend to experiencing all the discomforts of such travelling. Others insist on my having more than my fair share of space, and many acts of courtesy give a pleasant human touch to the journey. Not that I love discomfort or seek it.

*Written in moving train. First published in the *Modern Review*, Calcutta.

Nor do I indulge in travelling third class because there is any virtue in it or principle involved. The main consideration is one of rupees, annas and pies. The difference in third class and second class fares is so great that only dire necessity induces me to indulge in the luxury of second class travel.

In the old days, a dozen years ago, I used to write a great deal while travelling, chiefly letters dealing with Congress work. Repeated experience of various railway lines made me judge them from the point of view of facility of writing on them. I think I gave first place to the East Indian Railway; the North Western was fair; but the G. I. P. Railway was definitely bad and shook one thoroughly. Why this was so I do not know, nor do I know why fares should differ so greatly between the different railway companies, all under State control. Here again the G. I. P. Railway stands out as one of the most expensive and it will not even issue ordinary return tickets.

I have given up the habit of writing much in a train. Perhaps my body is less flexible now and cannot adjust itself so well as it used to to the shaking and jolting of a moving train. But I carry a box full of books with me on my journeys, taking always far more than I can possibly read. It is a comforting feeling to have books around one even though one may not read.

This journey was going to be a long one, to far Karachi, almost it seemed to me after my air journeys, half way to Europe. So my box was well filled with a variety of books. I started off, as was my wont, in an intermediate class compartment. But at Lahore, the next day, fearful and terrifying

accounts of the heat and the dust on the way weakened my resolve and I promoted myself to the luxuries of second class travel. Thus travelling in style and moderate comfort I went across the Sind desert. It was as well that I did so for even in our closely shuttered compartment clouds of fine dust streamed in through all manner of crevices and covered us layer upon layer, and made the air heavy to breathe. I thought of the third class and shuddered. I can stand heat and much else but dust I find much more difficult to tolerate.

Among the books I read on the long journey was about a remarkable and unusual man, Edward Wilson, lover of birds and animals and comrade unto death of Scott in the Antarctic regions. The book had a double appeal to me for it had come to me from yet another remarkable man. It was a gift from A. G. Fraser, for long principal of the Achimota College in West Africa, that noble and unique monument of African education which he had built up with labour and sympathy and affection.

The sandy, inhospitable desert of Sind passed by as the train sped along, and I read of the Antarctic regions and of man's gallant fight against the elements, of human courage that conquered mighty nature itself, of endurance almost beyond belief. And of high endeavour and loyalty to comrades and forgetfulness of self and good humour in the face of every conceivable misfortune. And why? Not for any advantage to the persons concerned, not even obviously for the public good or the marked benefit of science. Why then? Simply because of the daring that is in man, the spirit that will not submit but always seeks to mount

higher and higher, the call that comes from the stars. Most of us are deaf to that call but it is well that a few hear it and ennoble our present generation. To them life is a continual challenge, a long adventure, a testing of their worth :

"I count life just a stuff
To try the soul's strength on........."

Such a one was Edward Wilson and it is well that after having reached the Southern Pole, he and his companions lay down for their final rest in those vast Antarctic regions where the long day follows the long night and silence reigns. There they lie surrounded by immeasurable expanses of snow and ice, and over them the hand of man has put up a fitting inscription :

"To strive, to seek, to find and not to yield."

The Poles have been conquered, the deserts surveyed, the high mountains have yielded to man, though Everest still remains proud and unvanquished. But man is persistent and Everest will have to bow to him, for his puny body has a Mind that recognizes no bounds and a spirit that knows no defeat. And then, what remains? The earth becomes smaller and smaller and romance and knightly adventure seem to go out of it. We are even told that a flight to the Pole may be a common occurrence before long. And the mountains have funiculars running up their sides and luxury hotels at the top where jazz bands break the stillness of the night and mock the eternal silence of the snows, and dull middle-aged people play bridge and talk scandal, and bored

and blasé young people and old seek pleasure feverishly, and seek it in vain.

And yet, adventure is always there for the adventurous, and the wide world still beckons to those who have courage and spirit, and the stars hurl their challenge across the skies. Need one go to the Poles or the deserts or the mountains for adventure when the adventure of life is there for all who care? What a mess we have made of this life of ours and of human society, and with plenty and joy and a free development of the human spirit open to us, we yet starve in misery and have our spirits crushed in a slavery worse than that of old. Let us do our bit to change this so that human beings may become worthy of their great inheritance and make their lives full of beauty and joy and the things of the spirit. The adventure of life beckons and it is the greatest adventure of all.

The desert is covered with darkness but the train rushes on to its appointed goal. So also perhaps humanity is stumbling along though the night is dark and the goal hidden from us. Soon the day will come and instead of the desert there will be the blue-green sea to greet us.

*July* 17, 1936

# 2

## WORKING COMMITTEE 1936

The constitution of the Congress directs the President to select the members of the Working Committee for his term of office. This duty and this burden thus devolve upon me and I have given this matter the most careful and earnest consideration. Inevitably I have consulted many colleagues and sought their guidance in the matter. This became especially incumbent on me as I was placed in a somewhat peculiar position. As President, I was the chief executive of the Congress and was supposed to represent that great organization. But in some major matters of policy I do not represent the majority viewpoint to which expression has been given in the resolutions of the Lucknow Congress. Thus the Working Committee could not, at the same time, represent, on these matters, my views as well as those of the majority. I have felt that it would be improper for me, under these circumstances, to select a committee entirely in consonance with my views and that the views of the majority of Congressmen, as expressed in the open sessions of the Congress, must prevail. I was tempted to shift the burden of selection on the All India Congress Committee, so that this Committee might choose such persons to represent it

as it thought fit and proper. But after much thought I have come to the conclusion that this would not be a proper course to adopt and I may not shirk the responsibility that has been cast on me. I have tried therefore to form a committee which represents mainly the majority viewpoint, but which also contains some representatives of the minority. Such a selection has its disadvantages. I have endeavoured, however, to make it a committee which, I hope, will pull together in the struggle against imperialism and serve the Congress and the country worthily in this great struggle. I trust that my colleagues of the All India Congress Committee and Congressmen in general will give this Committee their loyal cooperation and support and strengthen its hands in the great work before us, so that we can build up a joint and impregnable anti-imperialist front.

The Committee is limited, under the constitution, to fifteen members, including the President. It is impossible to include all those whom I would like to have in it. I regret especially that some old and valued members, who have served on the Working Committee in past years, have been left out of it. I hope, however, that we shall continue to have their full cooperation and that we shall frequently avail ourselves of their advice.

I select the following fourteen members for the Working Committee :

*Treasurer*—Shri Jamnalal Bajaj
*General Secretary*—Shri J. B. Kripalani.

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Shri Rajendra Prasad, Shri

Vallabhbhai J. Patel, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Shri C. Rajagopalachari, Shri Subhas Chandra Bose, Shri Narendra Dev, Shri Jairamdas Doulatram, Shri S. D. Deo, Shri Jaya Prakash Narayan, Shri Bhulabhai Desai, Shri Achyut Patwardhan.

So long as Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan is in prison, Dr. Khan Sahib will act for him.

*April* 1936.

## 3

## TO MY FRIENDS AND CRITICS

To newspapers and journalists my gratitude is infinite for their courtesy in giving publicity to what I say and write. Especially I am beholden to my critics who labour so hard to improve me by pointing out my innumerable failings and blemishes. I value that criticism more even than the praise of others. My regret is that a life full of many activities, of rushing about from place to place, of addressing vast gatherings and being tossed about by friendly and enthusiastic crowds, of debate and argument, of heavy office work and the facing of mountains of letters, of an hour stolen now and then to cut myself away for a while from the strife and turmoil of our mad world and to lose myself in a pleasing volume, leaves me little chance or time to keep pace with the abundant advice which friends as well as opponents generously shower upon me. But sometimes I dip into this well of advice and criticism and, in spite of my innate modesty, a feeling of elation seizes me at the thought that even the casual words that fall from my lips move people so much, even though sometimes that movement may be one of wrath.

In this abundance of speaking and reporting perhaps I should not complain if errors are frequent and words are

torn out of their contest, or imaginary utterances fastened on to me, or my attempts at humour are not understood or taken too seriously. Life is hard enough as it is, it would be a difficult burden to carry but for its lighter touches. It is bad enough that I should speak so often; it would be an utter weariness of the flesh if I had to correct every bit of misreporting or misinterpretation. And the questions that are put to me! Innumerable and of an infinite variety they are, from God and religion to marriage, morality, sex, and those shadows of God on earth, vested interests and property. These questions seldom relate to my utterances or to the problems before the country. Indeed it is strange how my critics prefer to skip over what I say and to labour other matters.

Yet the questions interest me and I would gladly deal with them if life was not so short and our days numbered. Unhappily we are so circumstanced that we spend our youth and our later years in the dreary atmosphere of politics, in getting excited over the Communal Award and the Shahidganj mosque, and have no time to see life as it is or to face its real problems. For after all the real problem of life is one of human and social relationships, of the relation of man to man, of man to woman, of man to society. We cannot even see this problem whole, much less can we tackle it, for our eyes are blinded and our limbs shackled by the political and economic structure that envelops us.

So for the present I may not lose myself in answering these many questions and I shall content myself by referring the questioner to my autobiography wherein he will find

my general reactions to men and things. And yet I cannot remain wholly silent when vague insinuations are made about my colleagues and I am quoted as an authority for these. I find references to continuous frictions between my colleagues and myself, of imminent disruption within the Congress, and of other dire happenings. I find also some words of mine which I used at a women's meeting in Bombay distorted to mean something that I never intended.

I believe I have been frank enough at Lucknow and later about the anomalous position which I occupy in the Congress Executive. That curious and somewhat embarrassing position has however nothing to do with my socialist faith. It was entirely a political difference which saw the light of day at Lucknow. None of us made a secret of it for we felt that about vital matters we had all to be perfectly open and above board and frank with the public whose suffrages we seek and who will be the ultimate arbiter of India's destiny. So we agreed to differ and differ openly, but having done so, we also agreed to co-operate and pull together, not only because of the larger cause of Indian independence, which we all had at heart, but also because our points of agreement were far more numerous than our points of disagreement. There was, inevitably, a difference in outlook, a difference in stress on various things. All this was political, not socialistic, except in so far as socialism produced that difference in outlook and stress. Nothing that could be called socialistic appeared in any of the resolutions at Lucknow. Even the socialists realised that the primary issue was political, that of independence, and on that

they concentrated.

Having agreed to pull together, I must say that my colleagues have treated me and my vagaries with every consideration and I am deeply grateful to them. I realise fully, and I stated as much to my colleagues once, that I am a bit of a handful, always apt to jump and hop and often rushing in where wiser and sedater people would abide their time. Still they bore with me and suffered my vagaries. To talk of splits and the like is an absurdity. There can be no division in our ranks when the call of independence comes to all of us and tingles the blood in our veins. We may agree or disagree, we may even part company sometimes, but still we march together to the tune of that call. And to all who hear it and respond to it, we offer a warm welcome to our ranks, whatever their other views might be.

About Khadi again I have been reported as having passed disparaging remarks. I have stated often enough that I do not consider Khadi as a final solution of our economic ills, and therefore I seek elsewhere for that final solution. But still I believe that, situated as we are today, khadi has a definite value, political, social and economic, and must therefore be encouraged.

But most of the questions relate to socialism and unhappily betray not only ignorance but passion, which darkens the mind. Socialism is an economic doctrine. It is a way of organising the production and distribution and other activities of society. It is, according to its votaries, a solution of the ills from which society suffers today. And yet, in considering this economic policy, we are continually having

God and religion hurled at us, and Russia, like King Charles' head, is always cropping up. I am perfectly prepared to discuss the Almighty or the strange and mysterious ways in which he is worshipped, and I am equally willing to talk of Russia, for Russia is a fascinating country today. But I do object to being side-tracked from the main issue. That can only be caused by confusion or a deliberate avoidance of the real question.

About religion I am quite convinced that there must be the most perfect freedom of faiths and observance. People can worship God in any of the thousand ways they like. But I also claim that freedom not to worship God if I so choose, and I also claim freedom to draw people away from what I consider superstition and unsocial practices. But when religion comes in the garb of vested interest and exploits people, it is not religion and it must be countered.

I believe in the basic economic theory which underlies the social structure of Russia. I think also that Russia has made the most remarkable progress culturally, educationally and industrially, and even spiritually, if I may use the word in its real sense. But nevertheless I do not accept or approve of everything that has taken place in Russia and I do not therefore propose to follow blindfold the example of Russia. Therefore I prefer to use the word socialism rather than communism, because the latter has come to signify Soviet Russia. Some captains of industry in Bombay take great exception to my use of the word socialism instead of communism, apparently thinking that thereby I seek to delude our people. They need not excite themselves over this

matter. I am not afraid of the word communism. Constituted as I am, all my sympathies go to the under-dog and to him who is persecuted most. That in itself would be sufficient to incline me towards communism when all the power of the State and of vested interest tries to crush it. Others move in a different way and naturally and gracefully incline to an alliance with power and the top dog. That power in India is British Imperialism.

But words and labels confuse. What I seek is an elimination of the profit motive in society and its replacement by a spirit of social service, co-operation taking the place of competition, production for consumption instead of for profit. Because I hate violence and consider it an abomination I cannot tolerate willingly our present system which is based on violence. I seek therefore a more enduring and peaceful system from which the roots of violence have been removed, and where hatred shrivels up and yields place to nobler feelings. All this I call socialism.

How this will come to India I cannot say, what intermediate steps there will be, what crises to overcome. But I know this that without some such effort we shall not solve our problems of poverty and unemployment. If there are other ways why do not my critics place them before the country, instead of getting angry at something which they do not like or perhaps do not understand?

But before socialism comes, or can even be attempted, there must be the power to shape our destiny; there must be political independence. That remains the big and all absorbing issue before us, and whether we believe in social-

ism or not, if we are serious about independence, we must join forces to wrest it from unwilling hands.

I believe in full democracy, political and economic. For the moment I work for political democracy but I hope that this will enlarge itself into social democracy also. The Congress has laid down the only possible democratic procedure for settling our problems—that of a Constituent Assembly. I cannot understand how any person who calls himself a democrat can object to this or seek another way. But people who talk of the unthinking millions of India, as the signatures of the Bombay manifesto of Twenty-one did, and object to vital problems being placed before them, probably would not like to be called democrats.

Do we stand for a democratic solution of our problems? That is a question I should like to ask my critics. If so then why all this shouting and trembling and wrathful utterance when I place these problems before our people and try to make them think of them? I have hardly mentioned socialism to them except incidentally, but I have laid stress on the amazing poverty of our people, on the vast unemployment of our peasants and workers and middle classes, on the progressive deterioration of all classes except the handful at the top. That has been my sin in the eyes of that handful. But that is the only picture that comes before my eyes when I think of India. I cannot rid myself of it, try as I may. It is not a pleasant picture. I do not like it, and, as I see it, sometimes my blood freezes within me, and sometimes it boils with indignation that such things should be.

*June* 5, 1936

# 4

## AN AUTHOR REPLIES

For an author to enter into argument with his critics is an unbecoming procedure. He has had his say in his book, and it is right that they should have their say. For me to venture to criticise the critics of my Autobiography would be almost unpardonable, for reviewers both in England and India have treated this book with a generosity and goodwill which have been overwhelming.

But I am challenged by Mr. N. C. Kelkar and other friends and answers are demanded of me to a number of questions that they have framed. I have absolutely no desire to enter the lists on this issue with Mr. Kelkar, whom I have long respected, or others. But as I am asked questions, I cannot remain wholly silent.

What is my Autobiography? It is not meant to be a record of all the important events of the past few years. It is a record of my own thoughts and moods and how they were affected by external happenings. I endeavoured to make this a truthful record of my own mental development. How far I succeeded in doing so, it is not for me to say. But the important thing is not what happened, but how it struck me and what impression it produced on me. That is the test of the truth or otherwise of the book.

Of course if my own impression of what happened was at considerable variance with actuality, this would knock the bottom out of any argument that I might advance, and my own mind and thoughts would be based on falsehood. I would isolate myself from reality and probably shrivel up. Thus the truth or otherwise of events as recorded in the book is of importance.

But still I would venture to say that the primary test of the book is psychological. It has given me no little pleasure to find that many of my reviewers have proceeded on this basis and some English friends even, who are opposed wholly to my politics, have gained a certain psychological insight into the mind and soul of our national movement. For though I wrote as an individual about an individual, to some extent I may claim to have represented the mental conflicts of large numbers of others who worked in our freedom movement. True understanding between friends as well as opponents comes only from this psychological insight; as between opposing groups it is frightfully hard, if not impossible, to gain this insight.

I would beg therefore that my book be considered primarily from this aspect, all others are secondary.

My second request would be that the entire wood be considered as a whole and that we should not lose ourselves in the trees. Inevitably, in a great country like India and during a powerful nationalist movement, various sets of ideas emerge and fight for mastery. These ideas are bigger and apart from the individuals or leaders who express them, and as far as possible we should consider them as ideas and

not merely as appendages to persons whom we may like or dislike. Thus in our political movement during the past few years there was a certain Congress ideology, a Liberal ideology, a Responsivist ideology, as well as others. Today the economic and social issue having forced itself into the forefront, other sets of ideas are producing a ferment and a conflict in men's minds. In considering these various sets and complexes of ideas we can say, regardless of the individuals who hold them, that a particular one is progressive or harmful, it leads to independence or is reactionary. I hold that the Liberal and Responsivist ideologies are definitely reactionary and harmful, and they inevitably involve a co-operation with British imperialism. Thus instead of helping us to march along the road to freedom, they strengthen the hold of British imperialism. This has nothing to do with the individuals who may hold these views; I may respect them in their personal capacities and have affection for them and admire their character and courage. But still I may hold that they err politically and give the wrong lead. The Congress, I think, has given a straighter and a definitely anti-imperialist lead, and though in some matters it has been reactionary at times, it has, I believe, pushed us towards freedom. Believing this, I have given it my allegiance and worked for it to the best of my ability.

If these are my definite opinions must I not express them for fear of offending some people by my criticism of their views? That would be a futile and a puerile policy, unbecoming in a public man. We who dabble in public affairs and seek to change the destinies of millions dare not

remain quiet on vital issues. I claim the right of free criticism of public policies and I gladly acknowledge this right in others who may be opposed to my views. Only thus can we have glimpses of the truth and hammer out a right policy. But of course such criticism should be without malice or ill will.

It was with this viewpoint that I wrote my book. I may have failed to live up to the ideal aimed at, but the book does represent my own carefully considered views on the various ideologies and policies before the country. There may be minor errors here and there but they do not affect the main argument. I might add that some extraordinary references have appeared in the press to the effect that I have been going about apologising for my book and for its so-called inaccuracies. I have done no such thing and I am yet unaware of any major error in it.

Members of the Responsivist Party, I am told, sign the Congress creed of independence. Personally, though I welcome this, I am not prepared to accept that this is a final proof in their case or in the case of Congressmen generally, of the acceptance of the ideology of independence, as I understand it. It is well known that there are some Congressmen who are not terribly keen on independence and who seek continually to tone it down. The real test comes in action and in our day to day activities.

How far my own ideology of independence governs the Congress I cannot say. But I know it is widely prevalent in Congress ranks. I believe that it is essentially different from the ideas of political freedom that Liberals and Respon-

sivists, as a body, give expression to. This Liberal and Responsivist conception of Indian freedom, though opposed to British control in India, seems to me to move within the orbit of British imperialism. Hence, though disliking it and seeking to rid themselves of it, they in effect help it and strengthen it. They cooperate with it frequently and give it a moral backing which is injurious to our freedom movement. Many of them insist on the continuation of the British military occupation of India, an idea that is wholly repugnant to me. The whole conception of Dominion Status seems to me to be an acceptance of the basic fabric of British imperialism. That conception is therefore unacceptable to me. It is evident that our ideas in regard to imperialism, what it is and what it thrives on, differ fundamentally. It is not surprising therefore that with differing premises we should draw different conclusions.

The Liberals and the Responsivists have in the past repeatedly accepted high office under the British Government—Executive Councillorships, Ministries and the like. Whatever the motive behind it, I have no doubt in my mind that this inevitably results in intimate cooperation with and support of the imperialist system. It means cooperation in the repression of the freedom movement. We have seen that repeatedly in the past. Mr. N. C. Kelkar, if I remember rightly, once congratulated publicly one of his party members on his appointment as an Executive Councillor. If the Congress decides to accept office under the new Act, I am quite sure that to that extent it will cooperate with and strengthen British imperialism. It will also then become

partly responsible for any repression or suppression of civil liberties that might ensue.

Repression and the denial of civil liberties has frequently been condemned by the Liberals and the Responsivists. And yet, it has seemed to me that the condemnation has often been of the quantity of it and not the quality. This was natural enough as the official viewpoint as to the necessity of repression was largely accepted. I remember Mr. N. C. Kelkar pressing Government to release members of the Congress Working Committee from prison. The argument advanced was that the situation had improved sufficiently to permit this to be done, and, in any event, if they misbehaved again, they could be sent back to prison. That argument did violence to my way of thinking as it seemed to me a substantial justification of the Government's general policy and its previous activities.

Take again the replies I have received from Sir Sivaswamy Iyar and Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru to my circular on Civil Liberties. I make no grievance of their refusal to join the proposed organisation. Others also had done so without giving the particular reasons they gave. These reasons are important and significant and they go to show, to my thinking, that they accept the British Government's viewpoint in regard to the suppression of civil liberties, although they no doubt think that the Government went further than it should have done.

All this seems to me to be the acceptance of the ideology of imperialism and powerful moral support of the policy of repression. Innumerable other activities—politi-

cal, semi-political, social—at a time when fierce repression was going on all over the country, added to this moral support. For persons who felt keenly the distress of the country and the humiliation of the ordinances and the repression, it was hardly fitting to be hobnobbing continually with those who were responsible for this repression, of feasting with them, of giving parties to them. This was not a matter of sympathising with civil disobedience, but of *not* sympathising with the Government that was trying to crush the spirit of India. It was a question almost of common decency.

This is the general background of my thought and I should like Mr. Kelkar to understand it, though he might disagree with it utterly. And, if there is any substance in that thought, my conclusions follow from it. It does not help in the clarification of issues, if we call each other perverse or impute evil motives to one another.

I could give many quotations from speeches and writings which support my contention that there is no anti-imperialist outlook among leading members of the Responsivist Party as well as the Liberals. But this article is long enough already. I shall, however, mention one or two instances.

Mr. M. R. Jayakar (I think it was in an interview in the *Times of India* early in September 1935) appealed to his countrymen to work the new Act in a spirit of compromise, to enter into a pact with the Governor, not to oppose him in any way, and thus prevent the use of the special powers. If this is not an acceptance of the so-called Reforms and of the whole imperialist system which stands behind

them, I do not know what it is. I could not better the criticism of the 'Servant of India' (September 5, 1935) of this declaration of Mr. Jayakar.

Dr. Moonje has in the past frequently appealed for cooperation with the British Government and he was fortunate enough to be congratulated for it by the Calcutta 'Statesman'. His military school received the blessings of the Commander-in-Chief and Lord Willingdon is reported to have expressed the hope that the school would loyally serve the British Empire. Personally I have no desire to serve the British Empire nor have I any sympathy for those who have this passion. But however that might be, no one could call those who wish to serve and strengthen the British Empire as anti-imperialists.

*June* 16, 1936

# 5

# THE NEW OFFENSIVE

The New Offensive. But of course it is not new. We have long been aware of it. And yet it seems to be taking a new aspect and a more aggressive one. Forced to recognize that terrorism, of which so much has been made in recent years, does not exist any longer, the Sherlock Holmes and Watsons of the Bengal Government have searched diligently for fresh dangers hidden from the public eye. How else is the vast secret service system of the Government to be kept employed? They have loyal service to their credit, they have received fulsome praise from Viceroys and Governors, they have families to support, are they to be asked to join the swelling ranks of the unemployed?

We are told by people who are in the know of the secrets of Government that "there had been recently a marked tendency to abandon the terroristic policy of individual murder." It is comforting to know that the sleuth-hounds of Government have discovered this tremendous secret. Ordinary men and women had come to this conclusion many years ago, but then they had no secret information. They could only judge from the obvious, and the obvious, as every detective knows, is often very misleading. But now the mystery men have given their verdict and we can

sleep more securely in our beds. Terrorism is over, it has become the 'former enemy.' Its ghost is laid to rest.

But alas ! we may not have peace or rest for if terrorism is dead another enemy has risen in its place. "The enemy today is Communism." Red gold flows from Russia and Labour Unions, peasant associations, various *samitis*, *ashrams*, youth movements, etc., have all become the agents to spread this nefarious doctrine.

It is true that the individuals who spread this poison keep within the law. Their utterances are discreet, they talk of the distress among the peasantry, they discourage terrorism. But what of that ? They are clever and at the back of their minds there are surely deep-laid plans to commit dastardly crimes.

Therefore the time has come to meet this new menace. The many ordinance and other laws not being enough, special and additional measures should be enacted. We are told that "just as in the prolonged fight against terrorism it became necessary to introduce special legislation, so for the preservation of law and order and for the very existence of Government, established authority may have to take special measures to stem the rising tide of Communism in Bengal."

The fresh offensive has been prepared by a preliminary bombardment by the Government Publicity Department. They have broadcasted for public benefit what presumably are their views on communism. No one need be ignorant any longer of this intricate economic doctrine and philosophy of life. For we are told exactly what communism is. "Communism spells destruction, despair, death. Commun-

ism means the rooting out of all religion. Communism entails the complete elimination of culture. Communism robs the people of their land, their jewellery, their money and all their earthly possessions. Communism turns boys into thieves and murderers; it makes prostitutes of the nation's girlhood. The Great Moghul caused to be inscribed on a marble tablet in his Diwan-i-Khas. 'If there is a Paradise on earth, it is here, it is here.' Of very truth it may be written of Communism that:—'If there be a hell on earth, it is here, it is here.'"

This bright specimen of thought and writing has been fathered by the Publicity Department of the Government of India and it gives us an insight into the minds of those who govern us and produce 'special measures' and ordinances. Irresponsible and autocratic rulers have their own standards of behaviour, which are not for others, and we are well used to their mental aberrations and their progressive deterioration in the face of a popular challenge to their authority. But what shall we say to this nauseating product of a diseased mentality? Have the Government of India discarded all standards of intellectual integrity? Is their mental apparatus going to pieces?

The question is of interest to the student of politics, sociology or pathology. But it is something more vital for us, for we have to live under this dispensation and any one of us may be spirited away to the 'paradise' of the Andamans, or otherwise subjected to pains and penalties.

We have been discussing the problem of civil liberties in India, and some, giving civil liberty a theoretical allegiance,

have told us that we are partly responsible for its suppression. For if we behave why should the need of punishment arise? I should like to ask them, as well as the signatories of the Bombay Manifesto of the 21, what their reactions are to this fresh move on the part of Government.

We seem to be moving fairly rapidly to a state of affairs when our universities and text books of economics and history would serve little purpose. They might indeed do harm. The director of Public Information in India might well take their place and issue from time to time brief *credos* of the true doctrine which must be believed. Or, better still, he might have recourse to the radio and abolish the printing press.

*June* 15, 1936

# 6

# CONGRESS AND SOCIALISM

Socialism may be good or bad, it may be a dream of the distant future, or a problem of the present ; whatever it is or might be, it seems to occupy a large corner of the mind of India today. The word is bandied about from right to left, and behind it lurks, we are solemnly told, the grim shadow of communism. True, the notion of many of its critics as to what is socialism is of the haziest. And even professional economists, after the manner of Government propagandists, try to confuse the issue by dragging in God and religion and marriage and the degradation of women. We must not complain, although it is a tiring business to explain the alphabet to people who tell us that they can read. The curious part of it is that most of this talk and shouting about socialism comes from those who seem to dislike it and who do not want mention made of the word or the idea.

Socialism, as every schoolboy ought to know, is an economic theory which endeavours to understand and solve the problems that afflict the world today. It is also a way of looking at history and of trying to find from its wayward course the laws, if any, that govern human society. Vast numbers of people all over the world believe in it and seek to

realise it. A great area from the Pacific to the Baltic is already under its sway; other great countries like France and Spain, hover on the brink of it; and there is hardly a country in the world where it has not got a numerous and faithful following. Neither the intelligence behind it, nor the numbers that support it, necessarily establish its truth. But they do demand a respectful and careful consideration of it by us in India. They put us on enquiry for our own problems, political and economic, loudly demand solution. After considering it we may reject it utterly, or we may learn something from it at least even though we do not accept it wholly. To ignore this vital impulse which moves millions and captures both the minds and hearts of worthwhile people, can never be the path of wisdom.

But for us, it is rightly said, the political issue dominates the scene, and without independence all talk of socialism, or any other radical change in our economic system, is moonshine. Even a discussion about socialism introduces an element of confusion and divides our ranks. We must concentrate on political independence and that alone. This argument is deserving of consideration for we may not do anything which weakens us by breaking our joint front against Imperialism. To some extent the premises are accepted by the most ardent socialist for he admits that political freedom is the first and the essential objective for us today. Everything else must necessarily follow it, and without it there can be no other radical change.

Thus much is common ground. Nationalism is admitted to be our primary urge and concern. And yet the

way of looking even at this common objective is not the same.

Nobody wants to create division in our ranks and all of us talk continually of joint fronts against our powerful adversary. Yet we can hardly ignore conflicts of interests, and even as we advance politically (quite apart from socialism or the economic issue) these conflicts become more apparent. When the Congress came into the hands of the 'extremists,' the 'moderates' dropped out. This was not because of any economic issue but simply because politically we were becoming more advanced and the moderate elements consciously and subconsciously felt that too great a political advance might endanger their interests. They dropped out. Yet curiously this split did not weaken the Congress, much as one might have regretted the parting from some old colleagues. The Congress drew into its fold large numbers of others and became a more powerful and representative organisation. Later came non-cooperation and again some Congressmen could not keep pace with the great majority. They dropped out (again on the political issue, though behind it there were other issues) and again the Congress was not weakened. Vast numbers of additional people joined it and for the first time in its long history it became a power in our rural areas. It came to represent India as it had never done before and to move millions by its mandates and advice. Thus the inherent conflicts between small groups at the top and the vast majority of our countrymen became ever more apparent as we advanced politically. We did not create them. We went ahead regardless of them

and thereby increased in power and effectiveness.

Gradually other issues began to colour our political horizon. Gandhiji spoke about the peasantry ; he led strong movements in Champaran and Kaira. This was not a political issue though inevitably it had political repercussions. Why did he introduce this complication in the pure nationalism of our political movement ? Why did he go about speaking of the terrible poverty of our people ? This was new talk, a new orientation, likely to change the centre of gravity of our movement. He knew this well and deliberately he worked for this economic orientation of our political problem. Was it not largely because of this, as well as because of his great personality, that the millions rolled in under the banner of the Congress ? All of us began to talk of the under-dog, and the sorely tried and crushed under-dog turned to us with relief and hope.

Gandhiji persisted in his stress on the poverty of India's millions. We knew this of course theoretically—who could forget it ?—for we had the evidence of our own eyes, and the teaching of the giants of old—Dadabhai Naoroji, Digby, Ranade, Romesh Dutt. And yet it was a matter of books and statistics for us of the middle class. Gandhiji made it a live issue and we saw for the first time with horror-struck eyes what India was—a mass of hungry, starving, miserable people. To alleviate this hunger and unemployment he urged the revival of spinning and weaving. Many people who considered themselves very wise laughed at this, but the charkha, though it may not have gone far in solving the problem of poverty, brought relief to many. Even more so it gave a

new spirit of self-reliance and cooperation to those who lacked this most. It played a brave part in our political movement. Here again we see an extraneous non-political issue influencing for good our national movement.

In later years Gandhiji also stressed the problem of the depressed classes. In doing so inevitably he angered some groups of Sanatanists. There was conflict between these representatives of old custom and vested interest and the progressive forces. For fear of this conflict Gandhiji did not hesitate to launch his great campaign against untouchability. It was not directly a political issue. Yet it was raised, and rightly raised.

So in the Congress and outside it we see these conflicts of interests ever coming to the front. Whether it is a measure of social reform, like the Sarda Act or Dr. Bhagwan Das's new Bill, or a political measure affecting various interests, or a labour or peasant matter, this conflict of interests always comes up. Let us avoid conflict by all means, but how can one ignore it when it is there? And what are we to do about it? After sixteen years of stressing that we stand for the masses there can be only one answer to this question when this conflict affects them. That answer Gandhiji gave in one of his speeches at the Round Table Conference in London in 1931. "Above all," he said, "the Congress represents, in its essence, the dumb semi-starved millions scattered over the length and breadth of the land in its 700,000 villages, no matter whether they come from British India or what is called Indian India. Every interest which, in the opinion of the Congress, is worthy of pro-

tection has to subserve the interests of these dumb millions; and so you find now and again apparently a clash between several interests, and if there is a genuine real clash, I have no hesitation in saying, on behalf of the Congress, that the Congress will sacrifice every interest for the sake of the interest of these dumb millions."

Our ever-increasing contacts with the peasantry made us think more and more in terms of their grievances and their welfare. There were agrarian movements in Bardoli, in the United Provinces and elsewhere. Local Congress Committee had often, almost against their will, to face the problem of the conflict of interests and to advise their peasant members as to their course of action. Provincial Committees in some provinces did likewise.

In the summer of 1929 the All India Congress Committee itself, at a meeting held in Bombay, boldly faced the issue and gave an ideological lead to the country. With all its nationalist background and stress on political freedom, it declared emphatically that the economic structure of society was one of the root causes of our poverty. Its resolution ran thus:

"In the opinion of this Committee, the great poverty and misery of the Indian people are due not only to the foreign exploitation of India but also to the economic structure of society, which the alien rulers support so that their exploitation may continue. In order therefore to remove this poverty and misery and to ameliorate the condition of the Indian masses, it is essential to make revolutionary changes in the present economic and social structure of

society and to remove the gross inequalities."

Revolutionary changes! I ventured to use these words not so long ago in Lucknow city and some people thought that they were new on a Congress platform. Few socialists could improve on this general declaration of policy and outlook. Yet it would be absurd to say that the Congress had gone socialist. It was becoming more and more concerned with the poverty and misery of the Indian people and the realisation was growing that mere political changes were not enough, something more was necessary. That something more was a change in the present economic and social structure, a revolutionary change. What this change was going to be, it did not state; it was naturally, under the circumstances, vague and undecided about it.

Civil disobedience came, a political movement for a political objective. Again we saw a conflict of interests coming to the forefront and the big vested interests, fearing a far-reaching political change, opposed the movement and supported the British Government. In some areas, like the United Provinces, the conflict of interests was more marked because of the agrarian upheaval.

At Karachi the drive towards an economic orientation became more marked. The Congress hesitated to go far but it could not hold back. Again it declared that "In order to end the exploitation of the masses political freedom must include real economic freedom of the starving millions." It talked in terms of a living wage and it declared that the State shall own or control key industries and services, mineral resources, railways, waterways, shipping and other means of

public transport." A socialistic proposal, yet it was still far from socialism.

Thus has Congress been driven by force of events and the pressure of reality to face the economic issue. With all its passion for political freedom it could not isolate it from economic freedom. The two were inseparably bound up together. We have tried to keep them apart and to concentrate on political freedom, but economic problems would insist on barging in. We would shut our eyes to the conflicts of interests and yet, even on the political plane, these conflicts became ever more apparent. The Round Table Conference provided a revealing display of vested interests lining up behind British Imperialism and opposing the forces that were working for Indian freedom.

Memories are short and many people forget this recent history of the Congress and of India. Socialism or a change of the economic structure of society are not new ideas unheard of previously in the Congress; nor is the conflict of interests a novel conception. And yet it is perfectly true that the Congress is not socialistic today. But whether it is socialistic or not, it ceased many years ago to be an organisation thinking in political terms only and ignoring economic issues. As I write, one of its principal activities is to enquire into peasant grievances and draw up an agrarian programme. It must face this and other urgent economic problems. And in doing so, wherever conflicts of interests appear, as they are always appearing, all interests that clash with those of the masses will have to be sacrificed.

It is clear that we must concentrate on the political issue

—the independence of India. That is of fundamental and primary importance for us and any activity or ideology which blurs that issue is undesirable and not to be encouraged. On that I take it there is agreement amongst Congressmen of all ranks. Why then this talk of socialism?

As I understand it, it is not because any socialist imagines that socialism can have any place in India before political freedom has been established. It can only follow independence if India is ripe for it and the great majority of the people desire it. But the socialistic outlook helps in the political struggle. It clears the issues before us and makes us realise what the real political content (apart from the social content) of freedom must be. Independence itself has been variously interpreted, but for a socialist it has only one meaning and that meaning excludes all association with imperialism. Therefore stress is laid on the anti-imperialist character of our political strength and this gives us a yard measure to judge our various activities.

Further the socialist outlook stresses (what the Congress has been emphasizing in varying degrees during these past fifteen years) that we must stand for the masses and that our struggle should be of the masses. Freedom should mean the ending of the exploitations of the masses.

This brings us to a consideration of the kind of Swaraj we are aiming. Dr. Bhagwan Das, with a most commendable persistence, has been demanding for many years that Swaraj should be defined. I do not agree with him in some of his views but I do agree with him that we cannot go on talking vaguely about Swaraj without indicating, however

roughly, what kind of Swaraj we are aiming at. Are the present owners of vested interests to be the successors of the British in the governance of the country? Obviously that cannot be the Congress policy for we have often declared that we are against the exploitation of the people. So inevitably we must aim at strengthening the masses so that they may effectively hold power when imperialism fades away from India.

That strengthening of the masses, and of the Congress organisations through them, is not only necessary because of our objective, but because of the strength itself. Only the masses can give real strength to that struggle, only they can carry on the political fight to the end.

Thus the socialist outlook helps us in our present struggle. It is not a question of carrying on now a useless academical argument about a distant and problematic future, but of shaping our policy now so as to make our political struggle more powerful and effective. This is not socialism. It is anti-Imperialism. It is the political aspect as seen from the socialistic viewpoint.

Socialism of course looks further ahead. It aims at social reconstruction based on an elimination of the profit motive. That is not possible today and so the consideration of it may appear to some as academic and premature. But that view would be short-sighted indeed. For the consideration and clarification of the objective, even though we may not decide about it, affects our approach to it. In whose hands will power come when political freedom is achieved? For social change will depend on this, and if we want social

change we must see that those who desire such change have the power to bring it about. If this is not what we are aiming at, then it means that all our struggle is meant to make India safe for vested interests who desires no change.

The socialist approach is the approach of Marxism. It is a way of looking at past and present history. The greatness of Marx none will deny today and yet few realise that his realistic interpretation of events, which has illumined the long and tortuous course of history, was not a sudden and brilliant innovation. It had deep roots in the past; it was known to the old Greeks and Romans as well as to European thinkers of the Renaissance and onwards. They conceived of history as a movement and a conflict of ideas and interests. Marx applied science to this old philosophy, developed it and made it the brilliant exposition that has so impressed the world. There may be lacunae in this exposition, over-emphasis here and there. We must not look upon it as a set of dogmas, but as a scientific way of looking at history and social changes. Much is made of the fact that Marx emphasized the economic side of life only. He did emphasize it because it is important and because there had been a tendency to ignore it. But he never ignored the other forces which have moved human beings and shaped events.

Marx is a name that terrifies some people who know little about him. It may interest them to know what one, who, far from being an agitator, is a very respectable and honoured British Liberal said not long ago. Lord Lothian, in the course of the annual oration at the London School

of Economics in June 1931 said:

"Is there not more truth in the Marxian diagnosis of the ills of modern society than we have been accustomed to think? I confess that the prophecies of Marx and Lenin are being realized with the most uncomfortable accuracy. When we look round at the Western world as it is, and the persistence of its troubles, is it not obvious that we must probe into the fundamental causes far more deeply than we have been in the habit of doing? And in so doing, I think that we may find that a good deal of the Marxian diagnosis is true."

This confession from one who might easily have been Viceroy of India is significant. In spite of all the prejudices of his class and the powerful pressure of his environment, his keen intelligence could not help being attracted by the Marxian diagnosis. Lord Lothian may have changed his opinion during the past five years. I cannot say how far what he said in 1931 represents his thoughts today.

But Marxism is not an issue before the Congress today. The issue is whether we must fight the evil effects that we see around us or seek the causes that underlie there. Those who concern themselves with the effects only seldom go far. "They ought not to forget that they are fighting with effects, but not with the causes of these effects; they are retarding the downward movement, but not changing its direction, that they are applying palliatives, not curing the malady."

That is the real problem—effects or causes. And if we seek for causes, as we must, the socialist analysis throws

light on them. And thus though the socialist State may be a dream of the distant future, and many of us may not live to see it, socialism is a beacon light of the present, lightening up the path which we have to tread.

So socialists feel. But they must know that many others, their comrades in the present struggle, do not think so. They cannot assume, as some do, an attitude of superior knowledge and make of themselves a sect apart. They have to justify themselves in other ways and thus seek to win over to their way of thinking those other comrades and the country at large. For whether we agree or differ about socialism, we march together to the goal of independence.

*July* 15, 1936.

## 7

## REALITY

The elections are yet far off, half a year has to pass before this mimic war will be upon us. But their long shadow darkens the horizon and hoarse and strident voices assail our ears. Our newspapers are full of them and our middle class intelligentsia talk of little else. Yet as I wandered in Sind and the Punjab, this tumult and shouting seemed to be a little unreal, the talk of candidates and pacts and manoeuvres and intrigues ruffled the surface only. Underneath this surface I sensed strange currents, I heard a deep rumbling. Why did these vast crowds, especially in the rural areas, gather together or wait long hours by the road side? Not surely to see or hear a person who had gained notoriety, or just to pay their homage to the Congress. There was a deeper urge, a hunger that gnawed and required satisfaction. And perhaps if we could understand this urge and this hunger, we would also understand somewhat the problem of India.

But we are too absorbed in our election tactics, or in the communal decision, or in a mosque dispute, and the millions pass by ignored and not understood. They have not the gift of explaining their urges and their hunger, and our eyes look another way.

It was an extraordinary experience to see these scores of thousands of Punjab zamindars. They were not exuberant or loud-voiced like city-folk, the outward signs of enthusiasm were often lacking. There they sat quietly and stolidly, but behind that quietness there was commotion and underneath that peasant stolidity there were reserves of power and a deep unrest. As I watched them and tried to look within them I thought of a volcano which has long seemed extinct but which shakes again with inner fire, and of the sea which begins to darken before a storm.

Our meetings were sometimes interfered with by the police and the authorities, the organisers were arrested or interned, especially those who were suspected of socialist leanings. It was made clear that high authority did not approve of these gatherings.

> "By the King's Majesty it is proclaimed
> Now doff your caps, you ill-conditioned pack!
> That high authority is made aware
> Of leagues in secret join'd by lawless men
> Against the peace and order of this realm."

And yet the ill-conditioned pack came in its thousands and ever the cry was the burden of land revenue and debt. No one talked of the communal decision, or of Shahidganj, or of Muslim demands or Hindu rights. Hindu and Muslim and Sikh thought and talked only in terms of the common burdens they suffered under. And as I sat with them, the trivial conflicts of the cities receded into the distance and seemed utterly unimportant before these mighty manifesta-

tions of Peasant India. For those who solve this problem of the peasant in India, it will be well. But those who fail to do so will vanish like the snows of yester year.

*August* 9, 1936

# 8

# A ROAD-SIDE INTERLUDE*

We had had a heavy day full of meetings and processions. From Ambala we had gone to Karnal and Panipat and Sonepat and, last of all, Rohtak. The Punjab tour with all its enthusiasm and crowds was at last over. A sense of relief came over me after the long strain, and a weariness which demanded sleep from which there would be no quick awakening.

Night had fallen, and we rushed along the Rohtak-Delhi road, for we had to catch a train at Delhi that night. I could hardly keep awake. Suddenly we had to pull up, for right across the road sat a crowd of men and women, some with torches in their hands. They came to us and when they had satisfied themselves as to who we were, they told us that they had been waiting there since the afternoon. They were a hefty lot of Jats, petty zamindars most of them, and it was impossible to go on without a few words to them. We got out and sat there in the semi-darkness surrounded by a thousand or more Jat men and women.

'*Quami nara*,' said some one and a thousand throats answered lustily, three times, '*Bande Mataram*.' And then we had '*Bharat Mata ki jai*,' and other slogans.

*First published in *Treveni*, Madras.

"What was all this about," I asked them, "this *Bande Mataram* and *Bharat Mata ki jai*?"

No answer. They looked at me and then at one another and seemed to feel a little uncomfortable at my questioning. I repeated my question: "What did they mean by shouting out those slogans?" Still no answer. The Congress worker in charge of that area was feeling unhappy. He volunteered to tell me all about it but I did not encourage him.

"Who was this *Mata*, whom they saluted and whose *jai* they shouted?" I persisted in questioning. Still they remained silent and puzzled. They had never been asked these strange questions. They had taken things for granted and shouted when they had been told to shout, not taking the trouble to understand. If the Congress people told them to shout, why they would do so, loudly and with vigour. It must be a good slogan. It cheered them and probably it brought dismay to their opponents.

Still I persisted in my questioning and then one person, greatly daring, said that *Mata* referred to *dharti*, the earth. The peasant mind went back to the soil, his true mother and benefactor.

"Which *dharti*," I asked further, "the *dharti* of their village area, or of the Punjab, or of the whole world?" They were troubled and perplexed by this intricate questioning, and then several voices arose together asking me to tell them all about it. They did not know and wanted to understand.

I told them what Bharat was and Hindustan, how this vast land stretched from Kashmir and the Himalayas in the

north to Lanka in the south, how it included great provinces like the Punjab, and Bengal and Bombay and Madras. How all over this great land they would find millions of peasants like themselves, with the same problems to face, much the same difficulties and burdens, and crushing poverty and misery. This vast country was Hindustan, Bharat Mata, for all of us who lived in it and were her children. Bharat Mata was not a lady, lovely and forlorn, with long tresses reaching to the ground, as sometimes shown in fanciful pictures.

*Bharat Mata ki jai.* Whose *jai* then did we shout? Not of that fanciful lady who did not exist. Was it then of the mountains and rivers and deserts and trees and stones of Hindustan? 'No' they answered, but they could give me no positive reply.

"Surely our *jai* is for the people who live in India, the many millions who live in her villages and cities," I told them, and the answer was pleasing to them and they felt that it was right.

"Who are these people? Surely you and the like of you. And so when you shout *Bharat Mata ki jai*, you shout your own *jai* as well as the *jai* of our brothers and sisters all over Hindustan. Remember that *Bharat Mata* is you and it is your own jai." They listened intently and a great light seemed to dawn on their heavy peasant minds. It was a wonderful thought—that this slogan they had shouted for so long referred to them, yes to themselves, the poor Jat peasants of a village in Rohtak district. It was their *jai*. Why then let us shout it again, all together and with right

goodwill : *Bharat Mata ki jai.*

And so on into the darkness to Delhi city and the train, and then a long sleep.

*September* 16, 1936.

# 9

## THIS TOURING BUSINESS

This touring business is becoming more and more difficult for me. As a tour progresses it seems to gather momentum, the crowds become vaster and vaster, and the most carefully made plans go to pieces because of the pressure of innumerable human beings. All this enthusiasm is exhilarating, one feels intoxicated by it, and for some time at least one's physical capacity increases. But there is a limit to this increase; a twelve hour a day programme is increased to eighteen hours a day and even then it is not completed. Disappointed audiences, after waiting in vain for many hours, get irritated and their anger descends on the local organisers who are least to blame in the matter. And so, in the midst of widespread enthusiasm, sometimes a trial of unpleasantness is left behind. This can be avoided to a large extent and an attempt should be made to do so.

These difficulties are partly due to the tour programmes that are drawn up, and partly to extraneous causes. Tour programmes have been so heavy that, even apart from the physical strain involved, they are often incapable of fulfilment. A day cannot be extended beyond twenty-four hours. Inevitably there are delays at every stage when one has to deal with vast crowds. Fifty thousand men and

women moving in procession cannot be made to adhere strictly to a timetable. It takes time even to reach the dais of a meeting or to come away from it. To get a vast audience seated in an orderly manner is a laborious process, unless a great deal of previous staff work has preceded the meeting. And so delay accumulates on delay.

This is the fate of the regular programme. Then there are impromptu meetings and processions which have not been provided for. Every few miles along the road-side crowds gather together and wait for hours. It is ungracious to ignore them and pass them by without stopping. So one has to stop and thank them for their affectionate welcome and say a few words to them. Often enough the villages on the route are decorated and elaborate arches are put up. At the entrance to the village or town half the population turns out and waits patiently for hours. What is one to do with all this love and affection ? It is overpowering and one has to bow to it.

For various reasons I attract enormous crowds and I evoke an astonishing amount of enthusiasm. Partly this may be due to a certain personal popularity, but largely, I think it is due to the great prestige and influence of the Congress. Whatever the reasons may be, the fact of these vast gatherings of human beings, full of enthusiasm and excitement, must be taken into account and they must be dealt with fairly and squarely.

I trust therefore that in future tour programmes must be drawn up after full consideration has been given to all these factors. They must be reasonable and capable of

fulfilment ; they must allow a sufficient margin for road-side halts and impromptu gatherings. Processions should be avoided unless they are considered absolutely necessary. A large number of small meetings should be avoided (although even these small meetings tend to become big). It is better to concentrate on a few really big gatherings and microphones and amplifiers should be provided for these. It is not humanly possible to address these vast audiences without mechanical aids.

I make these criticisms but I am full of gratitude to the Congress workers and organisers on whom the burden of fixing up my tours has fallen. They worked hard and exhausted themselves in the process, but the magnificent response of our people overwhelmed them and me. The memory of that wonderful response will remain with me and will inspire me. I am proud and happy to be connected with an organisation, which by virtue of its long service and sacrifice, has secured in such ample measure the love and confidence of millions of our countrymen.

*September* 16, 1936.

# 10

## STUDENTS AND POLITICS*

India at present is a peculiar country and the questions that are raised surprise one. Some even argue that the independence of India is bad for India; that something less than independence is in reality more than it. Not being metaphysically inclined I find some difficulty in understanding these abstruse problems. Yet another peculiar question relates to students and politics. Students must not take part in politics, some say. What is politics? According to the usual interpretation in India (official India), to assist or support the Government in any way is not politics; but it is politics to criticise or work against the existing order in India.

Who are the students? They may be children in the elementary schools or young men and women in college. Obviously the same considerations cannot apply to both.

Quite a large number of senior students today possess a vote for the coming provincial elections. To vote is to take part in politics; to vote intelligently necessitates the understanding of political issues; to understand political issues results usually in accepting a certain political policy;

*First published in the *Students' Tribune,* Lahore.

and if one accepts that policy it is the duty of the citizen to push that policy, to try to convert others to it. Thus inevitably a voter must be a politician, and he should be an ardent politician if he is a keen citizen. Only those who lack the political or social sense can remain passive and neutral or indifferent.

Even apart from his duty as a voter, every student must, if he is properly trained, prepare himself for life and its problems. Otherwise his education has been wasted effort. Politics and economics deal with these problems and no person is properly educated unless he understands them. Perhaps it is difficult for most people to see a clear path through life's jungle. But whether we know the solution of the problem or not, we must at least know the nature of it. What are the questions that life puts to us? The answers may be difficult, but the curious thing is that people seek to answer without knowing the real questions. No serious or thinking student can take up this futile attitude.

The various isms that play such an important part in the world today—nationalism, liberalism, socialism, communism, imperialism, fascism, etc.—are efforts on the part of various groups to answer these questions. Which answer is correct? Or are they all steeped in error? In any event we have to choose and in order to choose we must know and have the capacity to choose correctly. This cannot be done if there are repressions and suppressions of thought and action. It cannot be done properly if High Authority sits on us and prevents the free play of the mind.

Thus it becomes necessary for all thinking individuals,

and more so for the student than for others, to take the fullest theoretical part in politics. Naturally this will apply to the senior students at life's threshold rather than the junior ones who are still far from these problems. But a theoretical consideration is not enough for a proper understanding; even theory requires practice. From the point of view of study alone the student must leave his lecture halls and investigate reality in village and town, in field and factory; to take part to some extent in the various activities of the people, including political activities.

One has ordinarily to draw the line somewhere. A student's first business is to train his mind and body and make them efficient instruments for thought, understanding and action. Before he is trained he cannot think or act effectively. Yet the training itself comes not from listening to pious advice, but by indulging in action to some extent. That action, under normal conditions, must be subordinated to the theoretical training. But it cannot be eliminated or else the training itself is deficient.

It is our misfortune that in India our educational system is thoroughly lop-sided. But an even greater misfortune is the highly authoritarian atmosphere that surrounds it. Not in education alone, but everywhere in India, red-liveried, pompous and often empty-headed Authority seeks to mould people after its own pattern and prevent the growth of the mind and the spread of ideas. Recently we have seen how this Authority has made a mess of things even in the realm of sport and our cricket team in England, full of brilliant players, was effectively hamstrung by the ignorant nobodies who

controlled it. Genius was sacrificed so that Authority might triumph. In our universities this spirit of authority reigns supreme and, in the name of discipline, comes down heavily on any who do not meekly obey. They do not like the qualities that are encouraged in free countries, the spirit of daring, the adventures of the soul in uncharted regions. Is it surprising then that we do not produce many men and women who seek to conquer the Poles or Everest, to control the elements and bring them to man's use, to hurl defiance at man's ignorance and timidity and inertia and littleness and try to raise him up to the stars ?

Must students take part in politics ? Must they take part in life, a full wholesome part in life's varied activities, or be of the clerkly breed, carrying out orders from above ? As students they cannot keep out of politics, as Indian students even more so they must keep touch with them. Yet it is true that normally the training of their minds and bodies must be their principal consideration during this period of their growth. They must observe a certain discipline but that discipline should not be such as crushes the mind and kills the spirit.

So, normally. But abnormal conditions come when all normal rules are swept away. During the Great War where were the students of England, France, Germany ? Not in their colleges but in the trenches, facing and meeting death. Where are the students of Spain today ?

A subject country is always to some extent in an abnormal condition. So India is today. And in considering these problems we must also consider our environment and

the growing abnormality in the world. And as we seek to understand it, we are driven to take part, however little it might be, in the shaping of events.

*October* 1, 1936.

# 11

## A PUDUKOTTAH RECEPTION*

One is apt to get a little tired mentally after continuous repetition of the same kind of incidents. Fortunately Pudukottah offered a variety which took us out of the dull rut. As we approached Pudukottah town I saw part of the Pudukottah army lining the road in battle array. I was interested. Further up a larger force of the army occupied the road. I grew more interested. So I got off the car and inquired from someone who might be the head of the Police or the Field Marshal what all this was about and whether there were manoeuvres of the army, or the International situation affected the Pudukottah State, and whether preparations were being made for the coming crisis, or was a riot feared. I was told that the army had turned out merely to clear the way for me so that the crowds might not embarrass me. A very delicate compliment indeed, on the part of the Pudukottah State to the President of the Indian National Congress, to which I was unaccustomed. I have had so far tremendous receptions from all manner of people and crowds. But to be escorted by an army through the streets lined with troops was a Viceregal experience which I had not had. So I thought I had better make the most of

*Pudukottah is a small Indian State in the Madras Presidency.

it while I had the chance and I decided to march through that part of the territory of this great State. And so we marched along, the Pudukottah army following while a silent crowd and people stood by. It must have been a pleasant sight to which I was not accustomed. We marched a mile or so when unfortunately, owing to pressure of time I had to go back to the car. And so I bade good-bye to the Pudukottah army and rushed off away to Trichinopoly.

This incident is full of meaning and shows us how States function and especially under more or less British Administration. For I understand that the ruler of Pudukottah is a minor and the administration is under British control. I was passing through the State at a great pace as I had no time to waste. I would not have stopped at all anywhere but for the State authorities who were full of fear of all manner of happenings, and did the very thing which I could not have done, owing to lack of time, and created a commotion all over the State and drew more attention to my passage than would have otherwise happened. So far as I am concerned I welcome this and I am grateful to the State authorities for this military arrangement made to welcome my passage through their territory. I understand that garlanding was specially forbidden by the State as a revolutionary activity which might upset the whole fabric of the administration. Probably the fabric is so flimsy that any breath of wind will blow it away. Hence its excessive nervousness.

*October* 16, 1936

## 12

# FAREWELL TO TAMIL NAD

Men and Women of the Tamil Nad :

For two weeks, I have wandered up and down your Province and visited many of your famous cities and large numbers of villages. I have addressed hundreds of meetings and vast multitudes of men and women. For these two weeks we have been together and have seen each other, and perhaps we have grown to understand one another a little better.

And now I am going back to the north and as I go, innumerable memories crowd into my mind—memories of surging crowds, and an enthusiasm bordering on frenzy, and shining eyes with unspoken pledges looking through them.

I brought the message of the Congress to you. That message was no new one to you, and yet you demonstrated anew, in your magnificent way, your allegiance to the Congress and to the country's freedom. Individuals come and go, but the cause remains and binds us together in a common unity. Right through this tour of mine, this sense of unity in a great enterprise has been with me, the unity of India trying to break through the divisions and shackles that are our lot today. I forgot that I was in the far south away

from my home in the north : only one thing mattered—the independence of India—and we were all comrades struggling shoulder to shoulder to realise this desire of our hearts. The love of India filled us and we looked forward, eagerly and anxiously, to the promise of freedom.

And everywhere with this love of independence was a passion for social freedom, a desire to end the exploitation of our people and establish a juster order which would put an end to the cause of poverty and the vast and growing unemployment which strangles us. The great crowds that gathered to hear me were largely naked poverty-stricken people, hungering for relief from their terrible burdens. And in their minds and ours political freedom and social freedom were mixed together and were two facets of the future we worked for.

But all this wonderful enthusiasm and overpowering affection have to be disciplined and organised lest they waste themselves on trivial objects. The Congress has endeavoured with much success to do this, but we must go further still, and harness this energy and vitality to the cause of the Congress and of India's freedom. For this, the Congress must spread its organisation, just as it has already done its appeal, to every village and function throughout on a democratic basis. Leadership is essential, but authoritarianism is bad, and already we suffer from it sufficiently under British domination.

In some places there were local disputes chiefly about Municipal and District Board elections. Some of them undoubtedly were due to a certain looseness in the choice of

Congress candidates. Men were chosen who had little of the Congress spirit in them and subsequently could not play the great game and even occasionally broke their pledges. That way lies danger. Our strength will lessen and our ideals fade if we lower down our quality, in search for quantity. Therefore we may not lower our ideals whatever happens.

Women came to our meetings in surprising numbers and it was clear that they were also to some extent politically awake. I was glad to see this awakening amongst them for women must play their full part in this national and social struggle.

Big problems face us. We must grow big enough to solve them and we may not allow the trivial or secondary to take first place in our minds.

I must express very deep gratitude to you for the affection showered upon me. Yet that was for the Congress, for I came as Congress President, the bearer of the Congress message. Remember that message, and remember also that true enthusiasm leads to activity, joint disciplined activity under the Congress flag, and in furtherance of the Congress aim.

I go back now, but I shall long remember this visit and I shall take the message of our comrades in the Tamil Nad to other parts and other people.

*October* 18, 1936.

## 13

## CALCUTTA

I go back from Calcutta after five crowded and strenuous days, a little tired but full of hope and elation. The weariness of the body counts for little and it passes when there is freshness of the spirit and these days in Calcutta have refreshed me and put new energy into me. Here, in this great city, I met many old comrades of the Congress, many people representing the districts of Bengal, representatives of the workers, young men and women, and all manner of other folk. I had the privilege of attending the meeting of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee. We were faced by a somewhat intricate problem, but both in the consideration of this problem and in discussions over wider issues I found an overwhelming desire on the part of all to cooperate with each other, to pull together amongst themselves and with the rest of India in the great cause of Indian freedom which is the predominant issue in our country today. That the B. P. C. C. passed an unanimous resolution is a matter for great satisfaction and I congratulate it on this achievement. More than that, however, what impressed me was the spirit which underlay this decision and the other problems that it faced. There seemed to be a vivid realisation that our salvation demanded the sinking of petty differences

and the building up of a strong and impregnable front against the imperialism that envelops us and crushes us. The measure of our realising this and understanding the wider issues that face us is the measure of our strength and hope for the future. I rejoice that Bengal stands together, a united house, prepared to face the opponents of Indian freedom and cooperate fully in the cause of Indian freedom and the emancipation of the masses from exploitation.

This spirit was visible not only in the ranks of the workers but in the general public. The magnificent welcome that was given to me on my arrival and the vast multitudes that I have addressed at numerous meetings are evidence of the faith of Bengal in the Congress and her vitality. The personal affection and consideration that I have received here from everybody has been overwhelming and it is difficult for me to express my deep gratitude for it. I shall remember it for long years. Not all the repression and suppression that Bengal has had to put up with has damped the spirit of her people or made them waver in their passion for freedom. This unquenchable spirit of hers shines brightly through all their torment and suffering. That spirit will conquer, I have no doubt. But, lest we fritter our energy over the less important things, we must always remember that first things must always come first and the first thing in India is Indian freedom, and the appalling poverty of India's millions. Everything else is secondary.

I go back now but Bengal will be often in my thoughts and we in the rest of India will expect brave things from

the people of Bengal. I shall not say good-bye for we shall meet again often and often in comradeship in the great cause.

*November* 9, 1936

# 14

## CONGRESS PRESIDENTSHIP

Ever since my name was mentioned for re-election to the Congress Presidentship I have thought repeatedly and anxiously over the matter. The idea did not attract me for I do not believe in the same person functioning again and again in one office. My utility, such as it is, would not disappear if I was not president. It might possibly be greater, for I would be relieved of the routine performance of many duties which take up a great deal of time and energy. The burden that a Congress President has to carry is no light one and his lot is not enviable. There were other colleagues and comrades fitted for the task and it seemed improper that I should in a way monopolise this seat of honour and this burden of authority. I discussed the matter with my comrades and I pressed for other names, notably that of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan. But Khan Saheb was wholly unwilling and the others were also reluctant. I felt that I could not myself adopt a wholly negative attitude as there were some reasons, in the past year as in the present, which favoured me. In a way I represented a link between various sets of ideas and so I helped somewhat in toning down the differences and emphasizing the essential unity of our struggle against imperialism. So, undecided, I could say neither

yes nor no definitely and I remained silent on this issue, leaving chance to decide it.

Nominations for the presidentship have now been made and the time for election draws near. I feel that I cannot remain silent any longer and I must tell my countrymen what my feelings are. I shall gladly welcome the election of any of my colleagues and co-operate with him in another capacity in the great enterprise we have undertaken. Should however the choice of my countrymen fall on me, I dare not say no to it ; I shall submit to their pleasure.

But before they so decide, they must realise fully what I stand for, what thoughts move me, what the springs of action are for me. In speech and writing I have given enough indication of this and from this I want to be judged. I am not an unknown quantity and I do not want to be accepted under any false pretences.

When I returned from Europe last March I came as one long cut off from political activity, without the living touch with events which is so necessary for those who dabble in public affairs. Yet I had the advantage of a period of quiet thought, detached from the day-to-day worries of a political life. I ventured to place these thoughts of mine before my countrymen at the last session of the Congress.

Since then, during a crowded eight months, I have picked up the old threads, resumed contact with the many-sided life of India, met innumerable comrades of mine, wandered about a great deal over this great land of ours, and looked into the eyes of millions of my countrymen and countrywomen. And so I have been able to form some

idea of India as she is today ; I have filled in that picture which had grown a little vague.

This further knowledge has not made me change in any way those views of mine which I expressed at Lucknow. It has but confirmed them. I see the world in the grip of a titanic conflict, of which our own struggle is but a part. I see the old order breaking up ; capitalism having fulfilled its purpose, decaying ; and imperialism, its latest off-shoot and development, entrenching itself before the onslaught of socialism and nationalism. For imperialism is but an aspect of this new capitalism and it is not possible to understand it without reference to this central fact.

In India the outstanding fact is the appalling poverty and misery of the people and the vast and growing dimensions of unemployment. There can be no substantial relief from this under imperialism and so perforce we must have independence. The primary issue becomes one of political freedom, though this is intimately allied to social issues, and only if this alliance is understood can effective advance be made and the right stress laid. I believe that through socialism alone can we solve our economic problems, but socialism can only function when India is politically free. Yet in that struggle for Swaraj itself the socialistic analysis helps by showing us the true nature of the struggle, its relation to the wider world struggle, and the kind of Swaraj we should aim at.

So the problem today in India is one of combating Imperialism in all its aspects, and the necessity for us is to build up an anti-imperialist front for this purpose. That

front must include all elements and people who desire independence whatever their social or economic objectives might be. It must include socialists and those who are not socialists alike on this basis. The Congress itself has offered the widest basis for this joint front. We must maintain that. We may not break that front for we have to face powerful imperialist and reactionary forces. If any weaken this front, they do so at their peril and to the injury of the nation.

Our task is therefore to pool our resources, to tone down our differences as far as we can, to bear with each other even though we may differ on some matters, for ours is the larger agreement on the issue of Indian freedom and independence. We have done so in the past and built up the magnificent structure of the Congress. We shall do so in the present and in the future and so build up on an ever wider foundation this strong and united front against imperialism.

The immediate task is to combat the new Act and all its works. The Congress Election Manifesto has declared that there can or will be no co-operation with this Act. Let there be no weakening in this resolve and let us carry it to its logical consequence. We shall fight the elections with all our strength but we shall fight them for this and no other purpose, remembering always that the real struggle and the real strength lies outside the legislatures.

These are my present thoughts and I place them before my countrymen so that they may know how my mind is working. But over and above all this lies the shadow of

international crisis and ever-impending war. We may not forget it for our fate and our future is involved in it.

*November* 20, 1936

# 15

# PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS TO THE NATIONAL CONGRESS, FAIZPUR, DECEMBER 1936

Eight and a half months ago I addressed you from this tribune and now, at your bidding, I am here again. I am grateful to you for this repeated expression of your confidence, deeply sensible of the love and affection that have accompanied it, somewhat overburdened by this position of high honour and authority that you would have me occupy again, and yet I am fearful of this responsibility. Men and women, who have to carry the burden of responsible positions in the world today, have a heavy and unenviable task and many are unable to cope with it. In India that task is as heavy as anywhere else and if the present is full of difficulty the veil of the future hides perhaps vaster and more intricate problems. Is it surprising then that I accept your gracious gift with hesitation?

Before we consider the problems that face us, we must give thought to our comrades—those who have left us during these past few months and those who languish year after year, often with no end in prospect, in prison and detention camp. Two well-beloved colleagues have gone —Mukhtar Ahmad Ansari and Abbas Tyabji, the bearers

of names honoured in Congress history, dear to all of us as friends and comrades, brave and wise counsellors in times of difficulty.

To our comrades in prison or in detention we send greeting. Their travail continues and it grows, and only recently we have heard with horror of the suicide of three detenus who found life intolerable for them in the fair province of Bengal, whose young men and women in such large numbers live in internment without end. We have an analogy elsewhere, in Nazi Germany where concentration camps flourish and suicides are not uncommon.

Soon after the last Congress I had to nominate the Working Committee and I included in this our comrade, Subhas Chandra Bose. But you know how he was snatched away from us on arrival at Bombay and ever since then he has been kept in internment despite failing health. Our Committee has been deprived of his counsel, and I have missed throughout the year this brave comrade on whom we all counted so much. Helplessly we watch this crushing of our men and women, but this helplessness in the present steels our resolve to end this intolerable condition of our people.

One who was not with us at Lucknow has come back to us after long internment and prison. We offer cordial welcome to Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan for his own brave self as well as for the sake of the people of the Frontier Province whom he has so effectively and gallantly led in India's struggle for freedom. But though he is with us, he may not, so the orders of the British Government in India run,

go back home or enter his province or even the Punjab. And in that province of his the Congress organisation is still illegal and most political activities prevented.

I must also offer on your behalf warm welcome to one who, though young, is an old and well-tried soldier in India's fight for freedom. Comrade M. N. Roy has just come to us after a long and most distressing period in prison, but, though shaken up in body, he comes with fresh mind and heart, eager to take his part in that old struggle that knows no end till it ends in success.

The elements have been unusually cruel to us during these past few months and famine and floods and droughts have afflicted many provinces and brought great suffering to millions of our people. Recently a great cyclone descended on Guntur district in the South causing tremendous damage and rendering large numbers homeless, with all their belongings destroyed. We may not complain of this because the elements are still largely beyond human control. But the wit of man can find a remedy for recurring floods due to known causes, and make provision for the consequences of droughts and the like, and organise adequate relief for the victims of natural catastrophes. But that wit is lacking among those who control our destinies, and our people, always living on the verge of utter destitution, can face no additional shock without going under.

We are all engrossed in India at present in the provincial elections that will take place soon. The Congress has put up over a thousand candidates and this business of

election ties us up in many ways, and yet I would ask you, as I did at Lucknow, to take heed of the terrible and fascinating drama of the world. Our destinies are linked up with it, and our fate, like the fate of every country, will depend on the outcome of the conflicts of rival forces and ideas that are taking place everywhere. Again I would remind you that our problem of national freedom as well as social freedom is but a part of this great world problem, and to understand ourselves we must understand others also.

Even during these eight months vast changes have come over the international situation, the crisis deepens, the rival forces of progress and reaction come to closer grips with each other, and we go at a terrific pace towards the abyss of war. In Europe fascism has been pursuing its triumphant course, speaking ever in a more strident voice, introducing an open gangsterism in international affairs. Based as it is on hatred and violence and dreams of war, it leads inevitably, unless it is checked in time, to world war. We have seen Abyssinia succumb to it; we see today the horror and tragedy of Spain.

How has this fascism grown so rapidly, so that now it threatens to dominate Europe and the world? To understand this one must seek a clue in British foreign policy. This policy, in spite of its outward variations and frequent hesitations, has been one of consistent support of Nazi Germany. The Anglo-German Naval Treaty threw France into the arms of Italy and led to the rape of Abyssinia. Behind all the talk of sanctions against Italy

later on, there was the refusal by the British Government to impose any effective sanction. Even when the United States of America offered to coöperate in imposing the oil sanction, Britain refused, and was content to see the bombing of Ethiopians and the breaking up of the League of Nations' system of collective security. True, the British Government always talked in terms of the League and in defence of collective security, but its actions belied its words and were meant to leave the field open to fascist aggression. Nazi Germany took step after step to humiliate the League and upset the European order, and ever the British 'National' Government followed meekly in its trail and gave it its whispered blessing.

Spain came then as an obvious and final test, a democratic government assailed by a fascist-military rebellion aided by mercenary foreign troops. Here again while fascist Powers helped the rebels, the League Powers proclaimed a futile policy of non-intervention, apparently designed to prevent the Spanish democratic government from combating effectively the rebel menace.

So we find British imperialism inclining more and more towards the fascist Powers, though the language it uses, as is its old habit, is democratic in texture and pious in tone. And because of this contradiction between words and deeds, British prestige has sunk in Europe and the world, and is lower today than it has ever been for many generations.

So in the world today these two great forces strive for mastery—those who labour for democratic and social

freedom and those who wish to crush this freedom under imperialism and fascism. In this struggle Britain, though certainly not the mass of the British people, inevitably joins the ranks of reaction. And the struggle today is fiercest and clearest in Spain, and on the outcome of that depends war or peace in the world in the near future, fascist domination or the scorching of fascism and imperialism. That struggle has many lessons for us, and perhaps the most important of these is the failure of the democratic process in resolving basic conflicts and introducing vital changes to bring social and economic conditions in line with world conditions. That failure is not caused by those who desire or work for these changes. They accept the democratic method, but when this method threatens to affect great vested interests and privileged classes, these classes refuse to accept the democratic process and rebel against it. For them democracy means their own domination and the protection of their special interests. When it fails to do this, they have no further use for it and try to break it up. And in their attempt to break it, they do not scruple to use any and every method, to ally themselves with foreign and anti-national forces. Calling themselves nationalists and patriots, they employ mercenary armies of foreigners to kill their own kith and kin and enslave their own people.

In Spain today our battles are being fought and we watch this struggle not merely with the sympathy of friendly outsiders, but with the painful anxiety of those who are themselves involved in it. We have seen our hopes wither and a blank despair has sometimes seized

us at this tragic destruction of Spain's manhood and womanhood. But in the darkest moments the flame that symbolizes the hope of Spanish freedom has burnt brightly and proclaimed to the world its eventual triumph. So many have died, men and women, boys and girls, that the Spanish Republic may live and freedom might endure. We see in Spain, as so often elsewhere, the tragic destruction of the walls of the citadel of freedom. How often they have been lost and then retaken, how often destroyed and rebuilt.

I wish, and many of you will wish with me, that we could give some effective assistance to our comrades in Spain, something more than sympathy, however deeply felt. The call for help has come to us from those sorely stricken people and we cannot remain silent to that appeal. And yet I do not know what we can do in our helplessness when we are struggling ourselves against an imperialism that binds and crushes.

So I would like to stress before you, as I did before, this organic connection between world events, this action and interaction between one and the other. Thus we shall understand a little this complicated picture of the world today, a unity in spite of its amazing diversity and conflicts. In Europe, as in the Far East, there is continuous trouble, and everywhere there is ferment. The Arab struggle against British imperialism in Palestine is as much part of this great world conflict as India's struggle for freedom. Democracy and fascism, nationalism and imperialism, socialism and a decaying capitalism, combat each other in the world of ideas, and this conflict deve-

lops on the material plane and bayonets and bombs take the place of votes in the struggle for power. Changing conditions in the world demand a new political and economic orientation and if this does not come soon, there is friction and conflict. Gradually this leads to a revolution in the minds of men and this seeks to materialise, and every delay in this change-over leads to further conflict. The existing equilibrium having gone, giving place to no other, there is deterioration, reaction and disaster. It is this disaster that faces us in the world today and war on a terrible scale is an ever present possibility. Except for the fascist Powers every country and people dreads this war and yet they all prepare for it feverishly, and in doing so they line up on this side or that. The middle groups fade out or, ghost-like, they flit about, unreal, disillusioned, self-tortured, ever-doubting. That has been the fate of the old liberalism everywhere, though in India perhaps those who call themselves Liberals, and others who think in their way, have yet to come out of the fog of complacency that envelops them. But we

> "Move with new desires.
> For where we used to build and love
> Is no man's land, and only ghosts can live
> Between two fires."

What are these new desires? The wish to put an end to this mad world system which breeds war and conflict and which crushes millions; to abolish poverty and unemployment and release the energies of vast numbers of peo-

ple and utilise them for the progress and betterment of humanity; to build where today we destroy. During the past eight months I have wandered a great deal in this vast land of ours and I have seen again the throbbing agony of India's masses, the call of their eyes for relief from the terrible burdens they carry. That is our problem; all others are secondary and merely lead up to it. To solve that problem we shall have to end the imperialistic control and exploitation of India. But what is this imperialism of today? It is not merely the physical possession of one country by another; its roots lie deeper. Modern imperialism is an outgrowth of capitalism and cannot be separated from it.

It is because of this that we cannot understand our problems without understanding the implications of imperialism and socialism. The disease is deep-seated and requires a radical and revolutionary remedy and that remedy is the socialist structure of society. We do not fight for socialism in India today for we have to go far before we can act in terms of socialism, but socialism comes in here and now to help us to understand our problem and point out the path to its solution, and to tell us the real content of the swaraj to come. With no proper understanding of the problem, our actions are likely to be erratic, purposeless and ineffective.

The Congress stands today for full democracy in India and fights for a democratic State, not for socialism. It is anti-imperialist and strives for great changes in our political and economic structure. I hope that the logic of

events will lead it to socialism for that seems to me the only remedy for India's ills. But the urgent and vital problem for us today is political independence and the establishment of a democratic State. And because of this, the Congress must line up with all the progressive forces of the world and must stand for world peace. Recently there has taken place in Europe a significant development in the peace movement. The World Peace Congress, held at Brussels in September last, brought together numerous mass organisations on a common platform and gave an effective lead for peace. Whether this lead will succeed in averting war, no one can say, but all lovers of peace will welcome it and wish it success. Our Congress was ably represented at Brussels by Shri V. K. Krishna Menon and the report that he has sent us is being placed before you. I trust that the Congress will associate itself fully with the permanent peace organisation that is being built up and assist with all its strength in this great task. In doing so we must make our own position perfectly clear. For us, and we think for the world, the problem of peace cannot be separated from imperialism, and in order to remove the root causes of war, imperialism must go. We believe in the sanctity of treaties but we cannot consider ourselves bound by treaties in the making of which the people of India had no part, unless we accept them in due course. The problem of maintaining peace cannot be isolated by us, in our present condition, from war resistance. The Congress has already declared that we can be no parties to an imperialist war, and we will not allow the exploitation of India's man

power and resources for such a war. Any such attempt will be resisted by us.

The League of Nations has fallen very low and there are few who take it seriously as an instrument for the preservation of peace. India has no enthusiasm for it whatever and the Indian membership of the League is a farce, for the selection of delegates is made by the British Government. We must work for a real League of Nations, democratically constructed, which would in effect be a League of Peoples. If even the present League, ineffective and powerless as it is, can be used in favour of peace, we shall welcome it.

With this international background in view, let us consider our national problems. The Government of India Act of 1935, the new Constitution, stares at us offensively, this new charter of bondage which has been imposed upon us despite our utter rejection of it, and we are preparing to fight elections under it. Why we have entered into this election contest and how we propose to follow it up has been fully stated in the Election Manifesto of the All India Congress Committee, and I commend this manifesto for your adoption. We go to the legislatures not to coöperate with the apparatus of British imperialism, but to combat the Act and seek to end it, and to resist in every way British imperialism in its attempt to strengthen its hold on India and its exploitation of the Indian people. That is the basic policy of the Congress and no Congressman, no candidate for election, must forget this. Whatever we do must be within the four corners of this

policy. We are not going to the legislatures to pursue the path of constitutionalism or a barren reformism.

There is a certain tendency to compromise over these elections, to seek a majority at any cost. This is a dangerous drift and must be stopped. The elections must be used to rally the masses to the Congress standard, to carry the message of the Congress to the millions of voters and non-voters alike, to press forward the mass struggle. The biggest majority in a legislature will be of little use to us if we have not got this mass movement behind us, and a majority built on compromises with reactionary groups or individuals will defeat the very purpose of the Congress.

With the effort to fight the Act, and as a corollary to it, we have to stress our positive demand for a Constituent Assembly elected under adult suffrage. That is the very cornerstone of Congress policy today and our election campaign must be based on it. This Assembly must not be conceived as something emanating from the British Government or as a compromise with British imperialism. If it is to have any reality, it must have the will of the people behind it and the organised strength of the masses to support it, and the power to draw up the constitution of a free India. We have to create that mass support for it through these elections and later through our other activities.

The Working Committee has recommended to this Congress that a Convention of all Congress members of all the legislatures, and such other persons as the Committee might wish to add to them, should meet soon after the election to put forward the demand for the Constituent Assembly,

and determine how to oppose, by all feasible methods, the introduction of the Federal structure of the Act. Such a Convention, which must include the members of the All India Congress Committee, should help us greatly in focussing our struggle and giving it proper direction in the legislatures and outside. It will prevent the Congress members of the legislatures from developing provincialism and getting entangled in minor provincial matters. It will give them the right perspective and a sense of all India discipline, and it should help greatly in developing mass activities on a large scale. The idea is full of big possibility and I trust that the Congress will approve of it.

Next to this demand for the Constitueut Assembly our most important task will be to oppose the Federal structure of the Act. Utterly bad as the Act is, there is nothing so bad in it as this Federation and so we must exert ourselves to the utmost to break this, and thus end the Act as a whole. To live not only under British imperialist exploitation but also under Indian feudal control, is something that we are not going to tolerate whatever the consequences. It is an interesting and instructive result of the long period of British rule in India that when, as we are told, it is trying to fade off, it should gather to itself all the reactionary and obscurantist groups in India, and endeavour to hand partial control to the feudal elements.

The development of this federal scheme is worthy of consideration. We are not against the conception of a federation. It is likely that a free India may be a federal India, though in any event there must be a great deal of

unitary control. But the present federation that is being thrust upon us is a federation in bondage and under the control, politically and socially, of the most backward elements in the country. The present Indian States took shape early in the nineteenth century in the unsettled conditions of early British rule. The treaties with their autocratic rulers, which are held up to us so often now as sacred documents which may not be touched, date from that period.

It is worthwhile comparing the state of Europe then with that of India. In Europe then there were numerous tiny kingdoms and princedoms, kings were autocratic, holy alliances and royal prerogatives flourished. Slavery was legal. During these hundred years and more Europe has changed out of recognition. As a result of numerous revolutions and changes the princedoms have gone and very few kings remain. Slavery has gone. Modern industry has spread and democratic institutions have grown up with an ever-widening franchise. These in their turn have given place in some countries to fascist dictatorships. Backward Russia, with one mighty jump, has established a Soviet Socialist State and an economic order which has resulted in tremendous progress in all directions. The world has gone on changing and hovers on the brink of yet another vast change. But not so the Indian States; they remain static in this ever-changing panorama, staring at us with the eyes of the early nineteenth century. The old treaties are sacrosanct, treaties made not with the people or their representatives but with their autocratic rulers.

This is a state of affairs which no nation, no people can tolerate. We cannot recognise these old settlements of more than a hundred years ago as permanent and unchanging. The Indian States will have to fit into the scheme of a free India and their peoples must have, as the Congress has declared, the same personal, civil and democratic liberties as those of the rest of India.

Till recent years little was heard of the treaties of the States or of paramountcy. The rulers knew their proper places in the imperial scheme of things and the heavy hand of the British Government was always in evidence. But the growth of the national movement in India gave them a fictitious importance, for the British Government began to rely upon them more and more to help it in combating this nationalism. The rulers and their ministers were quick to notice the change in the angle of vision and to profit by it. They tried to play, not without success, the British Government and the Indian people against each other and to gain advantages from both. They have succeeded to a remarkable degree and have gained extraordinary power under the federal scheme. Having preserved themselves as autocratic units, which are wholly outside the control of the rest of India, they have gained power over other parts of India. Today we find them talking as if they were independent and laying down conditions for their adherence to the Federation. There is talk even of the abolition of the viceregal paramountcy, so that these States may remain, alone in the whole world, naked and unchecked autocracies, which cannot be tampered

with by any constitutional means. A sinister development is the building up of the armies of some of the bigger States on an efficient basis.

Thus our opposition to the federal part of the Constitution Act is not merely a theoretical one, but a vital matter which affects our freedom struggle and our future destiny. We have got to make it a central pivot of our struggle against the Act. We have got to break this Federation.

Our policy is to put an end to the Act and have a clean slate to write afresh. We are told by people who can think only in terms of action taken in the legislatures, that it is not possible to wreck it, and there are ample provisions and safeguards to enable the Government to carry on despite a hostile majority. We are well aware of these safeguards ; they are one of the principal reasons why we reject the Act. We know also that there are second chambers to obstruct us. We can create constitutional crises inside the legislatures, we can have deadlocks, we can obstruct the imperialist machine, but always there is a way out. The Constitution cannot be wrecked by action inside the legislatures only. For that, mass action outside is necessary, and that is why we must always remember that the essence of our freedom struggle lies in mass organisation and mass action.

The policy of the Congress in regard to the legislatures is perfectly clear ; only in one matter it still remains undecided—the question of acceptance or not of office. Probably the decision of this question will be postponed till after the elections. At Lucknow I ventured to tell

you that, in my opinion, acceptance of office was a negation of our policy of rejection of the Act ; it was further a reversal of the policy we had adopted in 1920 and followed since then. Since Lucknow the Congress has further clarified its position in the Election Manifesto and declared that we are not going to the legislatures to cooperate in any way with the Act but to combat it. That limits the field of our decision in regard to offices, and those who incline to acceptance of them must demonstrate that this is the way to non-coöperate with the Act, and to end it.

It seems to me that the only logical consequence of the Congress policy, as defined in our resolutions and in the Election Manifesto, is to have nothing to do with office and ministry. Any deviation from this would mean a reversal of that policy. It would inevitably mean a kind of partnership with British imperialism in the exploitation of the Indian people, an acquiescence, even though under protest and subject to reservations, in the basic ideas underlying the Act, an association to some extent with British imperialism in the hateful task of the repression of our advanced elements. Office accepted on any other basis is hardly possible, and if it is possible, it will lead almost immediately to deadlock and conflict. That deadlock and impasse does not frighten us; we welcome it. But then we must think in terms of deadlocks and not in terms of carrying on with the office.

There seems to be a fear that if we do not accept office, others will do so, and they will put obstacles in the way of our freedom movement. But if we are in a

majority we can prevent others from misbehaving; we can even prevent the formation of any ministry. If our majority is a doubtful one then office for us depends on compromises with non-Congress elements, a policy full of danger for our cause, and one which would inevitably lead to our acting in direct opposition to the Congress mandate of rejection of the Act. Whether we are in a majority or in a minority, the real thing will always be the organised mass backing behind us. A majority without that backing can do little in the legislatures, even a militant minority with conscious and organised mass support can make the functioning of the Act very difficult.

We have put the Constituent Assembly in the forefront of our programme, as well as the fight against the federal structure. With what force can we press these two vital points and build up a mass agitation around them if we wobble over the question of office and get entangled in its web?

We have great tasks ahead, great problems to solve both in India and in the international sphere. Who can face and solve these problems in India but this great organisation of ours, which has, through fifty years' effort and sacrifice, established its unchallengeable right to speak for the millions of India? Has it not become the mirror of their hopes and desires, their urge to freedom, and the strong arm that will wrest this freedom from unwilling and resisting hands? It started in a small way with a gallant band of pioneers, but even then it represented a historic force and it drew to itself the goodwill of the Indian

people. From year to year it grew, faced inner conflicts whenever it wanted to advance and was held back by some of its members. But the urge to go ahead was too great, the push from below increased, and though a few left us, unable to adjust themselves to changing conditions, vast numbers of others joined the Congress. It became a great propaganda machine dominating the public platform of India. But it was an amorphous mass and its organisational side was weak, and effective action on a large scale was beyond its powers. The coming of Gandhiji brought the peasant masses to the Congress, and the new constitution that was adopted at his instance in Nagpur in 1920 tightened up the organisation, limited the number of delegates according to population, and gave it strength and capacity for joint and effective action. That action followed soon after on a countrywide scale and was repeated in later years. But the very success and prestige of the Congress often drew undesirable elements to its fold and accentuated the defects of the constitution. The organisation was becoming unwieldy and slow of movement and capable of being exploited in local areas by particular groups. Two years ago radical changes were made in the constitution again at Gandhiji's instance. One of these was the fixation of the number of delegates according to membership, a change which has given a greater reality to our elections and strengthened us organisationally. But still our organisational side lags far behind the great prestige of the Congress, and there is a tendency for our committees to function in the air, cut off from the rank and file.

It was partly to remedy this that the Mass Contacts resolution was passed by the Lucknow Congress, but unhappily the Committee that was in charge of this matter has not reported yet. The problem is a wider one than was comprised in that resolution for it includes an overhauling of the Congress constitution with the object of making it a closer knit body, capable of disciplined and effective action. That action to be effective must be mass action, and the essence of the strength of the Congress has been this mass basis and mass response to its calls. But though that mass basis is there, it is not reflected in the organisational side, and hence an inherent weakness in our activities. We have seen the gradual transformation of the Congress from a small upper class body, to one representing the great body of the lower middle classes, and later the masses of this country. As this drift to the masses continued the political role of the organisation changed and is changing, for this political role is largely determined by the economic roots of the organisation.

We are already and inevitably committed to this mass basis for without it there is no power or strength in us. We have now to bring that into line with the organisation, so as to give our primary members greater powers of initiative and control, and opportunities for day to day activities. We have, in other words, to democratise the Congress still further.

Another aspect of this problem that has been debated during the past year has been the desirability of affiliating other organisations, of peasants, workers and others,

which also aim at the freedom of the Indian people, and thus to make the Congress the widest possible joint front of all the anti-imperialist forces in the country. As it is, the Congress has an extensive direct membership among these groups; probably 75% of its members come from the peasantry. But, it is argued, that functional representation will give far greater reality to the peasants and workers in the Congress. This proposal has been resisted because of a fear that the Congress might be swamped by new elements, sometimes even politically backward elements. As a matter of fact, although this question is an important one for us, any decision of it will make little difference at present; its chief significance will be as a gesture of goodwill. For there are few well organised workers' or peasants' unions in the country which are likely to profit by Congress affiliation. There is not the least possibility of any swamping, and, in any event, this can easily be avoided. I think that now or later some kind of functional representation in the Congress is inevitable and desirable. It is easy for the Congress to lay down conditions for such affiliation, so as to prevent bogus and mushroom growths or undesirable organisations from profiting by it. A limit might also be placed on the number of representatives that such affiliated organisations can send. Some such recommendation, I believe, has been made by the U. P. Provincial Congress Committee.

The real object before us is to build up a powerful joint front of all the anti-imperialist forces in the country. The Congress has indeed been in the past, and is today such a united popular front, and inevitably the Congress must be

the basis and pivot of united action. The active participation of the organised workers and peasants in such a front would add to its strength and must be welcomed. Coöperation between them and the Congress organisation has been growing and has been a marked feature of the past year. This tendency must be encouraged. The most urgent and vital need of India today is this united national front of all forces and elements that are ranged against imperialism. Within the Congress itself most of these forces are represented, and in spite of their diversity and difference in outlook, they have coöperated and worked together for the common good. That is a healthy sign both of the vitality of our great movement and the unity that binds it together. The basis of it is anti-imperialism and independence. Its immediate demand is for a Constituent Assembly leading to a democratic State where political power has been transferred to the mass of the people. An inevitable consequence of this is the withdrawal of the alien army of occupation.

These are the objectives before us, but we cannot ignore the present day realities and the day to day problems of our people. These ever-present realities are the poverty and unemployment of our millions, appalling poverty and an unemployment which has even the middle classes in its grip and grows like a creeping paralysis. The world is full of painful contrasts today, but surely nowhere else are these contrasts so astounding as in India. Imperial Delhi stands, visible symbol of British power, with all its pomp and circumstance and vulgar ostentation and wasteful extravagance; and within a few miles of it are

the mud huts of India's starving peasantry, out of whose meagre earnings these great palaces have been built, huge salaries and allowances paid. The ruler of a State flaunts his palaces and his luxury before his wretched and miserable subjects, and talks of his treaties and his inherent right to autocracy. And the new Act and Constitution have come to us to preserve and perpetuate these contrasts, to make India safe for autocracy and imperialist exploitation.

As I write, a great railway strike is in progress. For long the world of railway workers has been in ferment because of retrenchment and reduction in wages and against them is the whole power of the State. Some time ago there was a heroic strike in the Ambernath Match Factory near Bombay, owned by a great foreign trust. But behind that trust and supporting it, we saw the apparatus of Government functioning in the most extraordinary way. The workers in our country have yet to gain elementary rights; they have yet to have an eight hour day and unemployment insurance and a guaranteed living wage.

But a vaster and more pressing problem is that of the peasantry, for India is essentially a land of the peasants. In recognition of this fact, and to bring the Congress nearer to the peasant masses, we are meeting here today at the village of Faizpur and not, as of old, in some great city. The Lucknow Congress laid stress on this land problem and called on the Provincial Committees to frame agrarian programmes. This work is still incomplete for the vastness and intricacy of it has demanded full investigation. But the urgency of the problem calls for immediate solu-

tion. Demands for radical reforms in the rent and revenue and the abolition of feudal levies have been made from most of the provinces. The crushing burden of debt on the agricultural classes has led to a wide-spread cry for a moratorium and a substantial liquidation of debt. In the Punjab *Karza* (Debt) Committees have grown up to protect the peasantry. All these and many other demands are insistently made and vast gatherings of peasants testify to their inability to carry their present burdens. Yet it is highly doubtful if this problem can be solved piecemeal and without changing completely the land system. That land system cannot endure and an obvious step is to remove the intermediaries between the cultivator and the State. Coöperative or collective farming must follow.

The reform of the land system is tied up with the development of industry, both large-scale and cottage, in order to give work to our scores of millions of unemployed and raise the pitiful standards of our people. That again is connected with so many other things—education, housing, roads and transport, sanitation, medical relief, social services, etc. Industry cannot expand properly because of the economic and financial policy of the Government which, in the name of Imperial Preference, encourages British manufactures in India, and works for the profit of Big Finance in the City of London. The currency ratio continues in spite of persistent Indian protest; gold has been pouring out of India continuously now for five years at a prodigious rate, though all India vehemently opposes this outflow. And the new Act tells us that we may do nothing

which the Viceroy or the Governor might consider as an unfair discrimination against British trade or commercial interests. The old order may yield place to the new but British interests are safe and secure.

And so one problem runs into another and all together form that vast complex that is India today. Are we going to solve this by petty tinkering and patchwork with all manner of vested interests obstructing us and preventing advance? Only a great planned system for the whole land and dealing with all these various national activities, co-ordinating them, making each serve the larger whole and the interests of the mass of our people, only such a planned system with vision and courage to back it, can find a solution. But planned systems do not flourish under the shadow of monopolies and vested interests and imperialist exploitation. They require the air and soil of political and social freedom.

These are distant goals for us today though the rapid march of events may bring us face to face with them sooner than we imagine. The immediate goal—independence—is nearer and more definite, and that is why perhaps we escape, to a large extent, that tragic disillusion and hopelessness which affects so many in Europe.

We are apparently weak, not really so. We grow in strength, the Empire of Britain fades away. Because we are politically and economically crushed, our civil liberties taken away, hundreds of our organisations made illegal, thousands of our young men and women always kept in prison or in detention camp, our movements continually watched by hordes of secret servicemen and informers, our spoken word

taken down, lest it offend the law of sedition, because of all this and more we are not weaker but stronger, for all this intense repression is the measure of our growing national strength. War and revolution dominate the world and nations arm desperately. If war comes or other great crises, India's attitude will make a difference. We hold the keys of success in our hands if we but turn them rightly. And it is the increasing realisation of this that has swept away the defeatist mentality of our people.

Meanwhile the general election claims our attention and absorbs our energy. Here too we find official interference, in spite of denial, and significant attempts to prevent secrecy of voting in the case of illiterate voters. The United Provinces have been singled out for this purpose and the system of coloured boxes, which will be used everywhere else, has been ruled out for the U. P. But we shall win in these elections in spite of all the odds—State pressure, vested interest, money.

That will be but a little step in a long journey, and we shall march on, with danger and distress as companions. We have long had these for our fellow travellers and we have grown used to them. And when we have learnt how to dominate them, we shall also know how to dominate success.

# 16

## A MESSAGE TO SOCIALISTS*

Comrade Masani has asked me for a message to your Conference. I send my greeting gladly and I hope that your deliberations will result in good to the great cause we have at heart. That cause today is best served by building up a powerful anti-imperialist joint front in the country. It is obvious that the National Congress is the only organisation which can function as such a joint front.

As you know I am vastly interested in the socialist approach to all questions. It is right that we could understand the theory underlying this approach. This helps to clarify our minds and give purpose to our activities. But two aspects of this question fill my own mind. One is how to apply this approach to Indian conditions. The other is how to speak of socialism in the language of India. I think it is often forgotten that if we are to be understood we must speak the language of the country. I am not merely referring to the various languages of India. I am referring much more to the language of the mind and the heart, to the language which grows from a complex of associations of past history and

*Sent to the Conference of the Congress Socialist Party at Faizpur, December 1936.

culture and present environment. So long as we do not speak in some language which has that Indian mentality for background we lose a great measure of our effectiveness. Merely to use words and phrases, which may have meaning for us but which are not current coin among the masses of India, is often wasted effort. It is this problem of the approach to socialism that occupies my mind—how to interpret it in terms of India, how to reach the hearts of the people with its hope-giving and inspiring message.

That is a question which I should like a socialist to consider well.

*December* 20, 1936

## 17

## A NOTE ON THE TOUR

The President of the National Congress has to undertake a considerable amount of touring. India is a large country, but the difficulty in the way of touring is not so much the largeness of the country as the absence of good roads in a great part of rural India. And yet it is this rural India that demands attention and even clamours for it. The General Elections all over India necessitated more extensive and intensive touring than usual, and most of this was done in the three months prior to the elections in February 1937. The actual number of touring days prior to the elections was 130 and during this period about 50,000 miles were covered —about 26,000 miles by railway, 22,500 by road (chiefly by car), and 1,600 by air. The means of transport varied greatly. They included aeroplanes, railway (usually third class travelling, sometimes second class, and on two occasions special trains for short distances); motor cars (from a Rolls Royce to a fifteen year old Ford); motor lorry; horse carriage, tonga, ekka, bullock cart, bicycle, elephant, camel, horse, steamer, paddle-boat, canoe, and on foot.

The Congress provinces visited were: Bombay, Punjab, Sind, Delhi, United Provinces, Andhra, Tamil Nad, Nagpur, Mahakoshal and Maharashtra. Calcutta was also visited, but not other parts of Bengal. Kerala (Malabar) was just

touched at Cannanore. This leaves only Gujrat, N.-W. F. Province, Assam and parts of Central India and Rajputana which were not visited.

Most of the touring was done in rural areas and apart from the meetings which had been arranged, there were innumerable impromptu gatherings by the road-side. During a day as many as a dozen meetings might be held, some of them having audiences of thirty thousand or more. Some mammoth gatherings approached a hundred thousand. A meeting of five thousand was considered a small affair. The daily total of persons attending was frequently 100,000, sometimes it was much greater. On a rough and conservative estimate, it can be said that ten million persons actually attended the meetings I addressed, and probably several million more were brought into some kind of touch with me during my journeying by road. These vast audiences usually had a large proportion of women.

These figures do not include the attendance at the Faizpur Congress, nor do they include the tours (such as those to Burma and Malaya) subsequent to February 1937.

These intensive tours called for a great deal of staff-work and efficient organisation. Generally speaking the organisation was excellent but too much was attempted to be done in a brief day of twenty-four hours. Day after day the programme began at dawn and went on till very late at night—eighteen hours or more. Once on February 13th—14th it meant continuous movement and addressing of meetings for the whole day and night—twenty-four hours—the next day's programme beginning soon after.

# 18

## ELECTION MESSAGES

### BEHAR

For seven days I sped like an arrow from the bow from place to place in Behar carrying the message of the Congress wherever I went. During these seven days I travelled from end to end of the province right up to the frontier of Nepal. I met vast audiences of poverty-stricken peasantry in the rura areas; I passed through ancient cities famous in history and tradition; and modern towns with their industries and commerce and unemployment and railway strikers. Through the steel city of Jamshedpur I went and across the black coal area of Jharia. Rapidly I passed through Chota Nagpur with its beautiful forests and its so-called aborigines. Everywhere I found enthusiastic response to the message of the Congress, everywhere love and goodwill beyond measure. I leave the province with regret but I carry back with me the fragrant memory of the generous affection of its people, and I shall feel strengthened and invigorated by it in the perils and tasks to come. Men and women of Behar, dear comrades in a great and glorious enterprise, I wish you good fortune and courage and perseverance.

*January* 1937

## UNITED PROVINCES

### I

I have completed my tour of the districts of the United Provinces and now I proceed to the South, to Maharashtra and Karnatak. I have visited nearly all the forty-eight districts of my province during the past weeks and months and I return full of joy and confidence at the wonderful enthusiasm of our people. The name of the Congress is magic both in town and village; it has become the shelter and hope for our millions. All the embattled legions of our rulers and of vested interests cannot keep those millions down any longer. They are weary of the long night; they smell the breath of the dawn, and so under the sheltering and inspiring banner of the Congress we march forward to triumph. For the present we have to face the elections. Tomorrow and the day after the voters march to the polling booths. Let every voter man or woman do his or her duty by the country and vote for the Congress. Thus we shall write in millions of hands our flaming resolve to be free.

*February* 6, 1937

### II

Comrades of the United Provinces, I send you greeting and from far Karnatak I join in your triumph. We have won overwhelmingly in the elections as we knew we would. But who has won ? Not our candidates in their individual capacities, not even we, workers and soldiers of the Congress who have toiled and laboured for this success. It

is the Congress that has won, that great organisation which has nurtured us and lighted the spark of hope in the hearts of our suffering millions. Even more so it is those masses themselves who have triumphed despite all the pressure and threats and violence and inducements that were offered to them. From all accounts it was a fine and inspiring sight to see orderly processions of our village folk marching long distances with our national flags, going to the polling booths and voting en bloc for the Congress candidates. They listened to our call, heard the message of the Congress and responded to it in magnificent measure. The United Provinces, as other parts of India, stands thus for the complete rejection of the new Constitution and for a fight to put an end to it and build afresh on the basis of a Constituent Assembly. But above all the masses voted for the Congress because they felt that the Congress stood for their interests, worked for them, and was their true representative. Let us remember this fact always and keep true to our mass moorings. Only that will bring us ultimate success and redeem our pledge to our people. Anything else will be a betrayal of our cause and of the hopes that we have roused in our millions. The lesson of the election for us in the U. P., in Behar and elsewhere is that wherever we have gone straight to the masses and spoken the clear and simple language that they understand, they have gladly and wholeheartedly thrown their weight in our favour. Where we have weakened and compromised, our success has been more partial. Our best and strongest candidates have been Congress workers with no personal influence or resources.

And so let us be humble before this victory and realise that the credit goes to the masses. The people of the U. P. and Behar and other parts of India have given notice to quit British Imperialism in India. I am confident that Bombay and Gujrat and Maharashtra and Karnatak will follow suit and deliver the same emphatic notice. The days of imperialism are numbered; the people have spoken and pronounced its doom. It is for us to follow this up and link ourselves still further with the masses. The elections will be over soon but the great work we are pledged to still remains. To that we have now to address ourselves. With full confidence we march to this final triumph.

*February* 12, 1937

### *To the People of Southern and Western India*

I go back to the north at the end of my long journeying. I go back to prepare for the longer pilgrimage to Swaraj of which this has been but a step. I brought the message of the Congress to the South and the West. But you have heard now that message not only through my feeble voice but from the numberless millions of the north who have rallied to the Congress call, and their thundering cry for freedom reverberates through the broad plains and valleys of Hindustan. What echo does that find in your hearts? Does not your blood quicken in your veins at that heartening cry of the masses? India awaits your own brave response and knows full well what it will be. Away with reaction and the enemies of freedom. Line up with the Congress,

line up, line up, and let us all march together to Swaraj. Who dares to ignore this call ?

*February* 1937

## 19

# PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS TO THE ALL INDIA CONVENTION, DELHI, MARCH 1937

We are used to our Congress gatherings, vast and impressive and representing the will of the Indian people for freedom. Behind them lie half a century of our country's history and a tradition of growth and change and adaptation to fresh needs and new situations. But today we meet in this Convention under novel conditions, for this Convention has no background except what we choose to give it, has no future except such as we determine. Well established institutions and organisations develop, in the course of time, a certain will and momentum which carry them forward almost apart from the desires of their constituent elements. They have an individuality which expresses itself in its own particular way, a certain stability and steadiness of purpose, as well as a certain conservatism. They do not easily move out of their moorings; like an elephant, they are heavy of movement, but when they move, they have all the greater momentum, and they change the shape of things. Such is our Congress.

But this Convention is new and few people seem to know what it is or what it is going to be. Some doubt is

justified; and yet all of us know well our moorings and our purpose, and though, as a Convention, we may be new, we have our roots in those past struggles which are written in the history of the Congress and our freedom movement. This Convention is a child of the Congress, looking to it for strength and guidance.

In writing this address I suffer from a disability. During the few days that will elapse between now and the meeting of the Convention, the major issues before us will be decided by the All-India Congress Committee. I do not know what these final decisions will be, and so, when this written message changes to the spoken word, much may have happened which might need variation or emphasis. And yet, whatever this variation might be, the Congress policy and programme are clear and fixed for us by repeated resolutions of the Congress itself and by our Election Manifesto. We must move within that orbit and any attempt to go out of it would be a betrayal of that policy and of the larger interests for which the Congress has stood. Those of you who have been elected to the new legislatures have asked the suffrage of the people on the basis of the Congress election manifesto, and you must inevitably take your stand on this. The very greatness of your success at the polls is striking testimony of the response of the masses to this policy and programme. Millions have testified to their faith and confidence in this; they have given it the final seal of the approval of the Indian people.

The electorate was confined to a bare ten per cent of our people, but everybody knows that the lower down the scale

we go, the greater is the Congress strength. The remaining ninety per cent are even more solidly for the Congress than the ten per cent who have supported us. Though our success has been overwhelming and has confounded our opponents, and swept away the representatives of the big vested interests who opposed us, it should be remembered that the whole machinery of election was so designed as to weaken us. The pressure of an autocratic and entrenched Government was exercised against us, and behind it were ranged all the reactionaries and obscurantists who always flourish under the shadow of imperialism. Yet we won in resounding manner.

Only in regard to the Muslim seats did we lack success. But our very failure on this occasion has demonstrated that success is easily in our grasp and the Muslim masses are increasingly turning to the Congress. We failed because we had long neglected working among the Muslim masses and we could not reach them in time. But where we reached, especially in the rural areas, we found almost the same response, the same anti-imperialist spirit, as in others. The communal problem, of which we hear so much, seemed to be utterly non-existent, when we talked to the peasant, whether Hindu, Muslim or Sikh. We failed also among the Muslims because of their much smaller electorate which could be easily manipulated and coerced by authority and vested interests. But I am convinced that, even so, we would have had a much larger measure of success if we had paid more attention to the Muslim masses. They have been too long neglected and misled and they deserve special con-

sideration. I have no manner of doubt that they are turning to the Congress to seek relief from their innumerable burdens and their future coöperation is assured, provided we approach them rightly and on the basis of economic questions.

We have too long thought in terms of pacts and compromises between communal leaders and neglected the people behind them. That is a discredited policy and I trust that we shall not revert to it. And yet some people still talk of the Muslims as a group dealing with the Hindus or others as a group, a medieval conception which has no place in the modern world. We deal with economic groups today and the problems of poverty and unemployment and national freedom are common for the Hindu, the Muslim, the Sikh, and the Christian. As soon as we leave the top fringe, which is continually talking of percentages of seats in the legislatures and State jobs, and reach the masses, we come up against these problems. This way lies the ending of what has long been known as the communal problem.

One of the most remarkable signs of the times is the ferment amongst the Muslims in India, both the intelligentsia and the masses. Without any effective leadership, they have drifted aimlessly, and they resent this helpless position and feel that the communal leadership they have had has weakened them politically, in spite of the trivial and superficial gains which they are supposed to have got from an imperialism which seeks to wean them away from the national movement. Muslim young men and old, and the Muslim press, are full of this self-analysis, and the desire to get out of

the communal rut and line up with the forces of freedom and progress is strong within them. They see how the Congress has swept away Hindu communal organisations, how it has captured the imagination of the masses, and they feel a little desolate and left out. They want to share in the triumphs of today and tomorrow, and are prepared to take their share of the burdens also. And so this election and our campaign, though they resulted in the loss of Muslim seats as a rule, have been a triumph for us even in regard to the Muslims. They have gone some way to lay the ghost of communalism. It is for us now to go ahead and welcome the Muslim masses and intelligentsia in our great organisation and rid this country of communalism in every shape and form.

The elections have many lessons to teach us but the outstanding fact is this: Where we went to the masses direct we won overwhelmingly. Our partial lack of success in some provinces was clearly due to the Congress organisation there being confined to the cities and having little contact with the peasantry. We must remedy these failings and speak more and more the language of the masses and fashion our policy to meet their needs. We must carry the Congress organisation to every village, the Congress message to every mud hut.

I have referred to some of our failings and some of our failures. It is well to remember these and not to allow ourselves to be swept away by success into forgetting them. We build for the future and our foundations must be well and truly laid. To win an election is a small matter for us; we are out to win the freedom of our people.

Having disposed of these failures let me refer to the success that has come to us, for it is this tremendous success, not surprising for us who know our people, but astounding and upsetting to others, that is the outstanding feature of these elections. How carefully and lovingly the Government had nursed the great vested interests of India, encouraged the big landlords and communalists, helped them to organise themselves to oppose us, and looked confidently for success in its evil venture! Where are they now, these pillars of Imperialism in India and exploiters of the Indian people? Sunk almost without trace, overwhelmed by the sea of Indian humanity, swept away by the big broom of the masses from the political scene. Like a house of cards, they have fallen at the touch of reality; even so will others go who oppose India's freedom, and a day will come when British imperialism throttles and crushes our people no more and is a dream of the past for us.

We went to our people and spoke to them of freedom and the ending of their exploitation; we went to that forgotten creature, the Indian peasant, and remembered that his poverty was the basic problem of India; we identified ourselves with him in his suffering and talked to him of how to get rid of it through political and social freedom. We told him of imperialism and of this new Act and Constitution which bind us still further and which we were out to end and replace by *panchayati raj*, fashioned by a Constituent Assembly, a grand *panchayat* of the nation, elected by all our people. We read out to him our Election Manifesto and explained its significance. He and his kind gathered in vast

numbers to hear us and, listening to the Congress message, his sunken eyes glistened and his shrunken starved body rose up in enthusiasm and the wine of hope filled his veins. Who that saw that vision can forget it, or that subsequent sight of thousands marching to the polling booths in disciplined array, ignoring pressure and threat, disdaining the free conveyances and free food offered to them by our opponents? It was a pilgrimage for them to give their allegiance to the Congress, to vote for the ending of the new Constitution, for the establishment of *panchayati raj* when they would themselves have power to liquidate the poverty that consumed them.

That is the significance of this election. If there is any meaning in democracy, if this complicated and expensive apparatus of elections and voting has any sense behind it and is not an impertinent farce, then the Indian people have spoken, so that even the deaf might hear, and proclaimed that they will not have this Constitution. They have given notice to quit British imperialism. This Constitution must therefore go, lock, stock and barrel, and leave the field clear for our Constituent Assembly.

We talk of and discuss our policy in the legislatures, but all this is vain and profitless parleying before the fundamental and dominant fact of the situation that this Constitution must go. So the people of India have decided and we shall be false and unfaithful representatives of our people if we allow ourselves to forget this fact contrary to that emphatic direction.

I know that there are elements amongst us who are too

fond of slurring over these fundamentals, who look longingly to office, and who have even compromised the dignity of our great cause and of the Congress by discussing the personnel of ministries long before the question of acceptance or non-acceptance of ministerial office has been decided by the All-India Congress Committee. Whatever their views may be on this issue, whatever the decision of the A. I. C. C. might be, I would have them remember, now and for the future, that no Congressman, worthy of his name, no Congress member of a legislature, can act except with the dignity and discipline that our cause and organisation demand. I would have them remember the Election Manifesto and the Congress resolutions on the basis of which they sought the suffrage of the people. Let no one forget that we have entered the legislatures not to coöperate in any way with British imperialism but to fight and end this Act which enslaves and binds us. Let no one forget that we fight for independence.

What is this Independence? A clear, definite, ringing word, which all the world understands, with no possibility of ambiguity. And yet, to our misfortune, even that word has become an object of interpretation and misinterpretation. Let us be clear about it. Independence means national freedom in the fullest sense of the word; it means, as our pledge has stated, a severance of the British connection. It means anti-imperialism and no compromise with empire. Words are hurled at us: dominion status, Statute of Westminster, British Commonwealth of Nations, and we quibble about their meaning. I see no real commonwealth anywhere,

only an empire exploiting the Indian people and numerous other peoples in different parts of the world. I want my country to have nothing to do with this enormous engine of exploitation in Asia and Africa. If this engine goes, we have nothing but goodwill for England, and in any event we wish to be friends with the mass of the British people.

Dominion status is a term which arose under peculiar circumstances and it changed its significance as time passed. In the British group of nations, it signified a certain European dominating group exploiting numerous subject peoples. That distinction continues whatever change the Statute of Westminster might have brought about in the relations *inter se* of the members of that European dominating group. That group represents British imperialism and it stands in the world today for the very order and forces of reaction against which we struggle. How then can we associate ourselves willingly with this order and these forces? Or is it conceived that we might, in the course of time and if we behave ourselves, be promoted from the subject group to the dominating group, and yet the imperialist structure and basis of the whole will remain more or less as it is? This is a vain conception having no relation to reality, and even if it were within the realms of possibility, we should have none of it, for we would then become partners in imperialism and in the exploitation of others. And among these others would probably be large numbers of our own people.

It is said, and I believe Gandhiji holds this view, that if we achieved national freedom, this would mean the end of British imperialism in India, and a necessary result of this

would be the winding up of British imperialism itself. Under such conditions there is no reason why we should not continue our connection with Britain. There is force in the argument for our quarrel is not with Britain or the British people, but with British imperialism. But when we think in these terms, a larger and a different world comes into our ken, and dominion status and the Statute of Westminster pass away from the present to the historical past. That larger world does not think of a British group of nations, but of a world group based on political and social freedom.

To talk, therefore, of dominion status, in its widest significance, even including the right to separate, is to confine ourselves to one group, which of necessity will oppose and be opposed by other groups, and which will essentially be based on the present decaying social order. Therefore we cannot entertain this idea of dominion status in any shape or form; it is independence we want, not any particular status. Under cover of that phrase, the tentacles of imperialism will creep up and hold us in their grip, though the outer structure might be good to look at.

And so our pledge must hold and we must labour for the severance of the British connection. But let us repeat again that we favour no policy of isolation or aggressive nationalism, as the word is understood in the Central European countries today. We shall have the closest of contacts, we hope, with all progressive countries, including England, if she has shed her imperialism.

But all this discussion about dominion status is academic talk. It is many years now since India put that idea by and

there can be no reversion to it. Today, with the whole world in the cauldron of change and disaster threatening it, this lawyers' jargon seems strangely out of place. What counts today for us is to break and end this Constitution. What counts for the world is Spain and British re-armament and the French armament loan, and the frantic and terrific race to be ready for war before this catastrophe comes to overwhelm civilisation. When will this come, suddenly and unannounced, and make a wreck of the modern world? That is the question for you and all of us, for on our answer and on our ability to cope with this crisis will depend the future of the Indian people. We have bigger decisions to take, graver choices before us, than those of lawyers' making.

Those decisions and that action require strength and perseverance and a disciplined nation. They require the masses in intelligent and organised movement for mass ideals and mass welfare. They demand that joint front of anti-imperialist forces, of which we have heard so much, and of which our National Congress is the living embodiment. It is not by mere votes in the legislatures, or petty reforms, or even artificial deadlocks, that freedom will come, but by the mobilisation of mass strength, and the co-ordination of our struggle in the legislatures with our struggle outside. For, essentially, we aim at the conquest of power, power for the Indian people to shape their destiny, and that power will only come through our own strength and will to achieve.

This is why the Working Committee has laid stress again on the extra-parliamentary activities of Congress members of the legislatures and on mass contacts. Our over-

whelming success in the elections will be wasted if we do not keep up our intimate contacts with the masses and seek to serve them and mobilise them for the great tasks ahead.

With this background of principles and Congress policy we have to consider the narrower issue of what we are to do inside the legislatures. This narrow issue, and especially the question of acceptance or non-acceptance of ministerial office, has given rise to much controversy, and has often been considered divorced from the more fundamental factors of the situation. If we remember these factors, and the Congress and the Working Committee have stressed them again and again, the issue becomes narrowed down still further. Indeed it hardly arises, except indirectly, for, as I have already stated, the outstanding fact of the elections is that the people of this country have given their verdict clearly, unequivocally and emphatically against this slave Constitution. If the British Government has any respect for democracy and still sees virtue in democratic procedure, as it so loudly proclaims, then it has no alternative but to withdraw this Constitution and Act. That is our position and our demand, and so long as it is not acceded to we shall labour and struggle to that end.

Congress members of the legislatures have their work cut out for them by Congress resolutions. That work is primarily to fight the Act and press and work for a Constituent Assembly. Some people, in their ignorance, have imagined that this Convention is itself the Constituent Assembly, and that it is going to draft a new Constitution for India. This Convention is going to do no such thing. That is

not its function and the time for drawing up India's Constitution is not yet. Nor is the Constituent Assembly a magnified All Parties Conference. The Constituent Assembly that we demand will come into being only as the expression of the will and the strength of the Indian people; it will function when it has sanctions behind it to give effect to its decisions without reference to outside authority. It will represent the sovereignty of the Indian people and will meet as the arbiter of our destiny.

How can this Assembly meet today when British Imperialism holds forcible sway here with its armies of occupation, and spies and informers and secret service, and the denial of civil liberty? When so many of our loved ones and comrades languish in prison or detention camp? When this monstrous Constitution has been imposed upon us, despite our indignant repudiation of it?

Therefore let us be clear about it. There is no room for a Constituent Assembly in India till we have in effect removed these burdens and obstructions, and the will of the Indian people can have sovereign play. And, till then, there is no room in India for any other constitution imposed upon us; there is room only, unhappily, for conflict and struggle between an imperialism that dominates and a nationalism that seeks deliverance. That nationalism is no weakling today and, though it may have to wait awhile for its deliverance, it will not tolerate domination and dictation.

So we are told by the Congress to go to the legislatures not to coöperate, for this so-called coöperation would

only be another name for submission to dictation, but to fight the Act. Whatever decision we might take on other issues, that basic policy remains and must remain. Inevitably it follows that we cannot have any alliances with individuals and groups who do not subscribe to this policy.

It is within this narrow framework that we have to consider the question of office acceptance. That question will have been decided by the All India Congress Committee by the time we meet in Convention and I stand before you, and by that decision this Convention will be bound. So I cannot say much about it here. I have often given expression to my views on this subject and our electoral victory has not changed them in any way. But we have to remember that whatever the decision of the All India Congress Committee might be, the whole logic of Congress resolutions and declarations and policy leads us to maintain a spirit of non-coöperation towards this Constitution and Act. Ordinarily in a democratic constitution to have a majority means an acceptance of ministerial responsibility. To refuse responsibility and power when a democratic process offers it to us is illogical and improper. But we have neither democracy nor power in this Constitution; the illogicality and contradiction lie in the Constitution itself. Are we to twist and distort ourselves to fit in with this perversion? Therefore whatever else we might do that spirit of non-coöperation and struggle against British imperialism must pervade our efforts.

Many of you are eager and desirous of doing something to relieve the burdens of our masses, to help the peasant and

the worker and the vast numbers of middle class unemployed. Who does not want to do that? No one likes conflict and obstruction, and we have hungered so long for real opportunities for serving our people through constructive effort. They cry aloud for succour, these unhappy millions of our countrymen, and even when their voices are silent, their dumb eyes are eloquent with appeal. It is difficult to live in this country surrounded by this human desolation and misery, unspoken often and the harder to bear because of that. We talk of Swaraj and independence, but in human terms it means relief to the masses from their unutterable sorrow and misery. Ultimately all that we work for resolves itself into that. And if we have a chance to give such relief even in a small measure, we cannot reject it.

But that relief must be for the millions, not for a few odd individuals. And if we think in terms of those millions what relief does this new Constitution offer? I have read its relevant clauses again and again, ever with a growing astonishment at the audacity of those who have framed it and thrust it on us, protecting all those who needed no protection, confirming their privileged position as exploiters, binding us hand and foot not to touch them in any way, and leaving the masses of India to sink deeper in the quicksands of poverty. We cannot give adequate relief to the masses within the scope of this Constitution; that is a demonstrable impossibility. We cannot build any new social structure so long as special privileges and vested interests surround us and suffocate us. We cannot carry out any policy, political, economic, social, educational or any other, when the whole

executive agency and civil service is not subject to our control, and we may not touch the major part of the revenues. The "special powers and responsibilities" of the Governors and the Governor-General apart, the Act by itself is more than sufficient to disable any minister.

But we can do some other things. We can take upon ourselves the odium and responsibility of keeping the imperialist structure functioning, we can become indirectly responsible for the repression of our own comrades, we can take away the initiative from the masses and tone down their fine temper which we ourselves have helped in building up. All this may happen if we follow the path of least resistance and gradually adapt ourselves to existing conditions. I do not think that this will happen for the temper of the Congress and the people will not allow it. We have gone too far for that.

Thus we do not seek the working of the new Constitution but the most suitable way of meeting and creating deadlocks, which are inevitable in this scheme of things, and of carrying on our struggle for freedom.

I can see no flaw in my reasoning, if the premises of the Congress resolutions are accepted, as accept them we must. Whatever the A. I. C. C. may decide on this question of office acceptance, we shall have to carry on the spirit and letter of those resolutions, in the legislatures as well as outside.

Our decisions must be all India decisions, for it would be fatal to have variations in policy to suit the minor needs of provinces. The unity of India has to be maintained; so also the unity of our struggle against imperialism. Danger

lurks in provinces acting separately and being induced to parley separately. Therefore, as I conceive it, the chief virtue of this Convention, now or later, is to keep this all India character of our work in the legislatures ever in the forefront and to prevent fissiparous tendencies and the development of provincialism. A necessary counterpart of this is the maintenance of a uniform discipline among Congress members of all legislatures. Every effort is likely to be made on the part of our opponents to affect breaches in that discipline and all India policy, but we must realise that without that self-imposed discipline and uniformity, our strength goes and we become isolated groups and individuals, ignored and crushed in turn by our opponents.

The wider policy that will govern us must inevitably come from the Congress and that policy must be loyally carried out by this Convention and its members. What other functions the Convention will perform will be laid down by the All-India Congress Committee and I do not wish to prejudge the issue in this written message of mine. But I can conceive the Convention or its representatives not only doing what I have mentioned above, but in times of national or international crisis playing an important role in our struggle for power and freedom.

You will soon go back to your provinces and constituencies and explain to our comrades there the decisions taken here in Delhi city, and prepare for the new forms of struggle that await you. We have some experience of this struggle for freedom and many of us have given the best part of our lives to it, and a variation in its shape or form

will not deter us. But we must hold to our old anchor and not be swept away by passing currents. And we must remember that we live in a dynamic world where almost everybody expects sudden and violent change and catastrophe. That crisis, national or international, may seize us by the throat unawares sooner than we imagine. So we must be ever ready for it, and we may not think or act in terms of static or slow-moving periods.

Our next task is the *hartal* of April 1st, and on that day I hope you will be in your constituencies to take part in that mighty demonstration against this slave Constitution and to declare again, with millions of our countrymen, that this Constitution must be scrapped and must give place to another, framed by a Constituent Assembly and based on the sovereignty of the people of India.

# 20

## FASCISM AND EMPIRE*

I gladly associate myself with the demonstration organised by the Spain-India Committee at the Kingsway Hall. Spain and the tragedy that is being enacted there dominate our thoughts today whether we live nearby in the other countries of Europe or in far India. For this tragedy and conflict are not of Spain only but of the wide world, and on what ultimately happens in Spain depends the future of so much that we value. Most people realise now that the Spanish war is no longer a Spanish affair, or a civil war between different groups of Spaniards. It is a European war on Spanish soil or, more correctly, an invasion of Spain by Fascist forces and mercenaries from abroad. And so in Spain these rival forces fight for mastery, fascism and anti-fascism, and democracy crushed in so many countries of Europe, fights desperately for life.

The issue as between Italian fascism and German Nazism, on the one hand, and Spanish democracy on the other, seems to be clear enough and I suppose that most people in England, who stand for democracy and freedom, sympathise with the

*For a demonstration organised by the Spain-India Committee at the Kingsway Hall, London, on April 9th, 1937.

Spanish people. But many of these very people are perhaps not so clear when they consider the policy of the British Government in regard to Spain. And when they go a few steps further and think of the relation of British imperialism to India, all clarity disappears.

And yet the real lesson of Spain is that fascism and imperialism are blood brothers, marching hand in hand, though they may have their faces averted from each other, or may even come into occasional conflict with each other. Englishmen see, more or less, the democratic side of their Government functioning in the domestic sphere, and they conclude that elsewhere also their Government has this democratic background. But the whole foreign policy of Britain during the last four years has shown that the forces that move it have nothing to do with democracy; they are friendly to the development of the fascist Powers, though they have half-heartedly and unsuccessfully tried to check this development occasionally when it seemed to threaten British imperial interests. That is the story of British policy in the Far East, in the shameful betrayal of Abyssinia, in the intrigues of Central Europe, and in the farce of non-intervention in Spain, culminating in the open avowal of Fascist Italy that it will continue to send its armies to crush the people of Spain.

Many people are bewildered by the seeming inconsistencies and contradictions of British foreign policy, and yet there is no real inconsistency. The inconsistency is in the minds of those who imagine that the democratic background of British domestic policy governs foreign policy also; or

sometimes there is inconsistency in the utterances of foreign ministers and other politicians who juggle with words to delude the public into reconciling these contrary tendencies and policies. In the field of action British foreign policy has pursued consistently and unhesitatingly the path of rapprochement with fascism. All the horror of Spain has not diverted it from its set purpose, the recent blood-curdling massacres in Addis Ababa have not affected it in the slightest degree. Even fear of endangering Britain's international position by the growth of fascist Powers in northern and Central Europe and in the Mediterranean has not resulted in a marked variation of that policy.

Why is this so? Because essentially imperialism and fascism are close of kin and one merges into the other. Sometimes imperialism has two faces—a domestic one talking the language of democracy, and a colonial one verging into fascism. Of the two, the dominant one is the latter and it ultimately governs larger policies. So we see that whatever government functions in Britain, whether it is a Conservative Government or a Labour Government or a 'National' Government, in India this Government wears a fascist uniform. The drift towards fascism continues in India and the new Constitution, with all its democratic façade in the provinces, is essentially fascist in conception and probably in action, especially in the federal structure. The only really democratic part of it is the larger electorate in the provinces and this electorate has declared overwhelmingly in favour of scrapping the new Act. But the Act and the Constitution continue, and the tremendous majorities elected

under this very Constitution are powerless and cannot have their way.

Empire and democracy are two incompatibles ; one must swallow the other. And in the political and social conditions of the modern world, empire must either liquidate itself or drift to fascism, and, in so drifting, carry its domestic structure with it.

So the question of British imperialism in India is intimately related to British domestic policy and governs the latter. It seems inconceivable that there will be any major social change in Britain so long as the Empire flourishes, nor is there likely to be any marked change in foreign policy. It seems more probable that great changes will take place in India, ending in the liquidation of the Empire, and these will result in major changes in Britain. Or the two may come more or less simultaneously.

The background of the Spanish struggle therefore is one of world conflict between democracy and the forces of freedom everywhere and fascism and imperialism. That is the lesson Spain teaches in her agony and through her blood and suffering. We who stand for Spain must learn that lesson in all its implications and stand equally for the ending of fascism and empire and all that they signify. We must pull out the root of the trouble.

But while we argue and debate, blood flows in Spain and heroic men and women and even children fight our battles and give their lives for human liberty. Governments deny them the aid that was their due, but the peoples of the world have heard their cry for succour and have responded

to it, for was not that cry the cry of the exploited everywhere?

We are ourselves helpless in India and hunger and stark poverty meet us everywhere; we fight for our freedom and to rid ourselves of the empire that exploits and crushes us. Famine and flood and natural calamity have pursued us and added to the burdens of empire. But out of our hunger and poverty we will send what help we can to our comrades in Spain, and though this may not be much, it will carry with it the earnest and anxious good wishes of the people of India. For those who suffer themselves feel most for their brothers in misfortune elsewhere.

*March* 27, 1937

# 21

# THE ARABS AND JEWS IN PALESTINE

My expression of sympathy with the Arab national movement and their struggle for freedom has brought me some protests from Jews in India. I venture therefore to state a little more fully what my attitude is to this problem of Palestine.

Few people, I imagine, can withhold their deep sympathy from the Jews for the long centuries of the most terrible oppression to which they have been subjected all over Europe. Fewer still can repress their indignation at the barbarities and racial suppression of the Jews which the Nazis have indulged in during the last few years, and which continue today. Even outside Germany, Jew-baiting has become a favourite pastime of various Fascist groups. This revival in an intense form of racial intolerance and race war is utterly repugnant to me and I have been deeply distressed at the sufferings of vast numbers of people of the Jewish race. Many of these unfortunate exiles, with no country or home to call their own, are known to me, and some I consider it an honour to call my friends.

I approach this question therefore with every sympathy for the Jews. So far as I am concerned the racial or the religious issue does not affect my opinion.

But my reading of war-time and post-War history shows that there was a gross betrayal of the Arabs by British imperialism. The many promises that were made to them by Colonel Lawrence and others, on behalf of the British Government, and which resulted in the Arabs helping the British and Allied Powers during the war, were consistently ignored after the war was over. All the Arabs, in Syria, Iraq, Transjordan and Palestine, smarted under this betrayal, but the position of the Arabs in Palestine was undoubtedly the worst of all. Having been promised freedom and independence repeatedly from 1915 onwards, suddenly they found themselves converted into a mandatory territory with a new burden added on—the promise of the creation of a national home for the Jews—a burden which almost made it impossible for them to realise independence.

The Jews have a right to look to Jerusalem and their Holy Land and to have free access to them. But the position after the Balfour Declaration was very different. A new State within a State was sought to be created in Palestine, an ever-growing State with the backing of British Imperialism behind it, and the hope was held out that this new Jewish State would, in the near future, become so powerful in numbers and in economic position that it would dominate the whole of Palestine. Zionist policy aimed at this domination and worked for it, though, I believe, some sections of Jewish opinion were opposed to this aggressive attitude. Inevitably, the Zionists opposed the Arabs and looked for protection and support to the British Government.

Such case as the Zionists had might be called a moral

one, their ancient associations with their Holy Land and their present reverence for it. One may sympathise with it. But what of the Arabs? For them also it was a holy land—both for the Muslim and the Christian Arabs. For thirteen hundred years or more they had lived there and all their national and racial interests had taken strong roots there. Palestine was not an empty land fit for colonisation by outsiders. It was a well-populated and full land with little room for large numbers of colonists from abroad. Is it any wonder that the Arabs objected to this intrusion? And their objection grew as they realised that the aim of British imperialism was to make the Arab-Jew problem a permanent obstacle to their independence. We in India have sufficient experience of similar obstacles being placed in the way of our freedom by British imperialism.

It is quite possible that a number of Jews might have found welcome in Palestine and settled down there. But when the Zionists came with the avowed object of pushing out the Arabs from all places of importance and of dominating the country, they could hardly be welcomed. And the fact that they have brought much money from outside and started industries and schools and universities, cannot diminish the opposition of the Arabs, who see with dismay the prospect of their becoming permanently a subject race, dominated, politically and economically, by the Zionists and the British Government.

The problem of Palestine is thus essentially a nationalist one—a people struggling for independence against imperialist control and exploitation. It is not a racial or religious one.

Perhaps some of our Muslim fellow-countrymen extend their sympathy to the Arabs because of the religious bond. But the Arabs are wiser and they lay stress only on nationalism and independence, and it is well to remember that all Arabs, Christian as well as Muslim, stand together in this struggle against British imperialism. Indeed some of the most prominent leaders of the Arabs in this national struggle have been Christians.

If the Jews had been wise they would have thrown in their lot with the Arab struggle for independence. Instead they have chosen to side with British imperialism and to seek its protection against the people of the country. Ultimately therefore the struggle resolves itself into one of nationalism versus imperialism, and all other minor aspects of it, such as the Arab-Jew problem, though important today, have little historical significance. In the same way the communal problem, spoilt child of British imperialism, looms large in India today, but in the wide range of history it loses all importance.

India and Palestine have both their national problems and both struggle for independence; they have something in common in this struggle and the opponent is the same. In both cases, as elsewhere, nationalism comes into contact with new social forces and is affected thereby, and gradually takes shape as an aspect of the world problem, which affects us all alike whether we realise it or not. We must therefore understand each other and sympathise with each other.

As we take this long view the Arab-Jew question fades into insignificance. The Arabs of Palestine will no doubt

gain their independence, but this is likely to be a part of the larger unity of Arab peoples for which the countries of western Asia have so long hankered after, and this again will be part of the new order which will emerge out of present day chaos. The Jews, if they are wise, will accept the teaching of history, and make friends with the Arabs and throw their weight on the side of the independence of Palestine, and not seek a position of advantage and dominance with the help of the imperialist Power.

I trust, therefore, that the people of India will send their warmest greetings and good wishes to the Arabs of Palestine in their brave struggle for freedom against a powerful adversary.

*June* 13, 1936

# 22

## SPAIN AND PALESTINE*

Political India is full today of talk of the coming provincial elections and candidates for these elections are cropping up everywhere. As the days go by we shall probably hear more and more of these elections and the air will be full of sound and fury which always accompany them. Other questions also occupy our minds such as the communal question or even the petty controversy about Hindi and Urdu. And yet how petty all these are before the mighty problems of poverty and unemployment—the poverty that crushes our millions, the unemployment that has us by the throat. Inevitably we must think of these problems for our sphere of thought and action is India.

But to confine ourselves to Indian problems is not good enough, it is not even sufficient for our own national purposes or our struggle for freedom. Every tyro in public life knows that the politics and economics of different countries are related to each other, that the world hangs together today as it has never done before, and the great problems we have to face are essentially world problems. To ignore this world

*Speech delivered on Palestine Day, September 27, 1936, in Allahabad.

aspect of any major issue is to lose perspective and invite error.

Therefore let us look round the world today with all its conflict and tension and cruelty and unhappiness, and behind all, its vast questioning. We meet today especially to think of the little country of Palestine and of its troubles. In a world view this problem of Palestine has relatively little importance for bigger things are happening elsewhere. And yet it has an intrinsic importance of its own and it throws a light on the working of imperialism from which we ourselves suffer. Therefore it is right that we should consider it and send our greetings to those who are struggling for freedom there.

But before we turn our thoughts to Palestine I should like to take you to Spain for a while for that will give us a broader view of the world stage. It is in Spain today that the most vital happenings are taking place, frightful and terrible events, of enormous consequence to the future of Europe and the world. Our fate in India is bound up with them more than we realise.

What has happened in Spain? Some months ago there were normal democratic elections there and as a result a popular radical party—a joint popular front—came into power. They formed a government of a liberal democratic variety. It was not a communist or even socialist government. There was not a single communist or socialist in it. They started with a programme of liberal reform to take Spain out of the feudal and reactionary ruts in which it had lived for so long. They made good progress, and then suddenly there was a

military rebellion, headed by the army chiefs and other reactionaries. And this rebellion first started not in Spain, but in Morocco with the aid of non-Spanish troops. It was a rebellion against law and order—words so dear to the British Government—against the constituted government of the country, against a moderate liberal régime.

How did these military bosses dare to raise the flag of rebellion? It is clear enough now. They did it with the material aid of the Fascist countries, of Germany and Italy and, it is interesting to note, financial aid from the big financiers of the city of London.

The Spanish Government and people were taken aback. It was terribly difficult for unorganised and improperly armed masses to face an organised and well-equipped army in rebellion. And this was why the rebels expected an easy victory. But the Spanish people rose at the bidding of their popular government and without discipline or proper arms they faced bravely the rebel armies, most of which consisted of Moroccan troops. There was a mass levy of the people, even boys and girls rushed to the rescue of their hard-won liberty. We saw a strange sight—these masses fighting against regular armies and holding them often in check.

The reactions in other countries were noteworthy. Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy were entirely on the side of the rebels and gave them every help. France sympathised with the Spanish Government but dared not help. In England the great newspapers, like the *Times*, frankly sympathised with the rebels, thus indicating clearly the attitude of the British Government and the British ruling classes. British

financiers rejoiced at the victories of the rebels. European governments evolved a policy of non-intervention which meant in effect that the Spanish Government could not be helped, but the rebels could draw aid from outside.

And so this terrible tussle goes on in Spain with everything weighted in favour of the rebels. And yet the ordinary people, men and women, boys and girls, are keeping their end up and giving their lives in thousands to prevent their country from falling under a bloody and most reactionary tyranny.

In Spain today we see clearly the terrible conflict of the forces of progress and the forces of reaction, the conflict which is latent all over the world. On the issue of this conflict depends whether Europe and the world will be dominated by Fascism or not. On that issue depends vast and bloody war all over the world. The triumph of the rebel means the strangling of France by three fascist countries surrounding her. It means that Fascism will make a triumphant attempt at world dominion in co-operation with the Fascism of Japan.

In this vital issue we find the ruling classes and government of Britain definitely favouring Fascism. We find imperialist Britain with her much vaunted democracy sympathising with those who are trying to crush democracy in Spain. For it must be remembered that the struggle in Spain is not between communism or socialism and Fascism, but between democracy and a cruel military-Fascism.

This is not really surprising for essentially Imperialism and Fascism are of one family and if a crisis comes they

stand together. All over the world today they oppose the forces of progress—in Europe of social progress, in India and other subject countries of even political progress. Between imperialist and fascist Powers there is also inherent conflict for many of them want a greater share in the spoils of exploitation. But despite this mutual conflict they sympathise with and aid each other as against the social urge to freedom and the nationalist struggle for political freedom. And thus we find the Indian struggle for independence a part of this world struggle against imperialism and fascism. So also the struggle that is going on against British imperialism in Palestine.

We must have this larger and clearer view or else we shall lose ourselves in a maze and fail to understand events. But if we have this to guide us and to provide us with a yard measure we shall be able to judge of happenings correctly and we shall know which group or individual is on this side of the struggle or that. In India we find sometimes persons posing as experts on foreign affairs expressing sympathy for the rebel cause in Spain or for fascism generally, and some of our newspapers unthinkingly accept this outlook. Essentially this is propaganda for the fascist and reactionary cause. It is not surprising that reactionaries in India should sympathise with reactionaries elsewhere.

In Palestine the problem seems to be one of Arabs and Jews, and some of our Muslim friends here look upon it as a religious problem demanding sympathy for their co-religionists. That is a wrong and misleading outlook. It is a problem of a growing nationalism desiring freedom and being

suppressed by imperialism. In this process, British imperialism, as in India, has tried to play off one community against another and set the Jews against the Arabs. Like our own communal problem, they have sought to produce a communal problem in Palestine. So also the French Government have done in Syria. We must learn from this what the true genesis of this communal problem is in subject countries and try to remove the root cause.

It is true that at present there is ill-will and conflict between the Arabs and Jews in Palestine. It is also true that a true solution will come by an understanding between them based on the freedom of the country. The Jews have been and are the victims of a cruel fascism and we must feel for their sufferings. It is a misfortune that they should allow themselves to be exploited in Palestine by British imperialism. Their future in Palestine lies in coöperation with the Arabs and in recognition of the fact that Palestine is and must continue to be essentially an Arab country. If that is admitted coöperation is easy and Jews will be welcomed in Palestine, as well as in Trans-Jordan, to help, as they are in a position to do, in the development of the country. Arabs and Jews have coöperated in the past and lived together as friends. There is no reason why they should not do so again.

For the moment the immediate issue is the fresh determination of British imperialism to crush the Arab movement. Large additional British armies are being sent to Palestine almost to conquer the country afresh. Martial law will flourish there. Our sympathies and good wishes must go out to the people of Palestine in this hour of their distress.

The crushing of their movement is a blow to our nationalist strength as well as to theirs. We hang together in this world struggle for freedom.

I am aware that outrages and regrettable happenings have taken place in Palestine. We must disapprove of them for they tarnish and weaken a good cause. I also know that various feudal elements are trying to exploit the nationalist sentiment to their own advantage. But, in spite of all this, let us remember that essentially the struggle is one of Arab nationalism seeking freedom against British imperialism, and all the power of that imperialism is trying to crush it. It cannot ultimately be crushed for nationalism and the will to freedom survive.

But though we send our sympathy and good wishes to the people of Palestine, the real way to help is to play our own part worthily in our own freedom struggle in India. That is but another, and perhaps the most important, aspect of the great struggle against world imperialism. It is absurd for people to talk of sympathy for the Arabs, and then coöperate with British imperialism in India.

For us therefore the problem becomes one of carrying on our own struggle for independence. All those who stress other and smaller aspects, like the communal aspect, divert attention from the real issue. In this struggle we shall waste our energy and injure the cause if we think in terms of minor improvements with the help of that very imperialism which we seek to combat. In the Congress Election Manifesto this vital background of our struggle has been emphasized. This manifesto has been welcomed by the

country as a whole, though there are some people who have grown angry over it. We see here the essential difference between our great organisation standing for anti-imperialism and certain principles, and others who have no clear vision and who always think in terms of individuals and petty reforms or communal favours. If the country wants freedom it has only one course open to it—to line up with the Congress. Our doors are open to all on this basis ; we are not exclusive. But those who think in terms of coöperation with British imperialism have no common ground with us. They may be estimable people, as many of them are, but the question is not of individuals but of principles. And in the great world crises that overshadow the horizon, it is essential that we should offer a strong and united front to the forces of imperialism and reaction. Only the Congress offers that front.

The Congress attitude is clear. Only in one matter—the question of accepting or not accepting office under the new Constitution—is it still undecided. My own view about this has been repeatedly stated and I hold by it with the same conviction as ever. It is that we must not accept offices or ministries or else we help in working the new Act. This flows naturally from the Congress Manifesto and I trust that when the time comes, this decision will be taken.

*September* 27, 1936

# 23

# THE COMMUNAL AWARD

During my speeches in the Punjab I have referred on several occasions to the Communal Award. Short reports in English of long speeches in Hindustani inevitably give a somewhat misleading idea of what I said and criticism of it is thus sometimes based on wrong data. It is always desirable that there should be clarity of ideas on controversial issues so that while we may differ, we should at least realise clearly what the issues are. I am therefore briefly stating here what my views are on the Communal decision. I have already given expression to these views in my Lucknow Congress address, where I stated that the Communal decision and democracy can never go together. Its very basis is the denial of democracy and it must inevitably be a tremendous barrier in the way of independence and the consideration of social and economic issues which are the real problems facing us in India. I cannot conceive of any one, thinking clearly in terms of independence or social change, accepting or approving of the communal decision. It has been a matter of great surprise and regret to me that many of our Muslim friends and comrades, who have stood for Indian independence, should so approve of this pernicious decision.

There is no question of my being neutral or non-

committal about this Award, nor, so far as I am aware, is that the Congress position. I am not in the habit of being neutral about important matters. To the Communal decision I am entirely opposed and I cannot willingly accept it at any time because to do so would be for me to forget independence and social freedom and the democratic tradition.

The question therefore for me is, not to approve or disapprove of the Award or to remain neutral. I am not neutral and I disapprove of it strongly. It resolves itself into this : how to get rid of this most undesirable thing ? I can see only two ways of doing this : the way of independence when inevitably such arrangements will have to go and give place to more democratic methods, and the way of mutual adjustment and compromise between the principal groups interested in the Award. I would add that I do not think that any real compromise is possible between those who stand for independence and those who expect to live for ever under the shadow of the British Empire. They look different ways, they work for different objectives.

To expect that the British will come to our aid in this matter is to expect the impossible. It is to their manifest advantage not to do so. To expect the communal leaders to do so is equally unlikely. The only way thus is to divert the attention of the broad masses to national and economic problems which affect them much more and thus enable them to see the communal question in its true perspective. To go on laying great stress on the Communal Award defeats the very purpose we aim at for it prevents people from thinking of other issues.

The position of the Congress on the communal question has long been clear. It has declared that it stands for a national democratic solution but should there be a compromise between the parties concerned, it would probably accept it. Apart from this it lays stress on the Constituent Assembly for the framing of a constitution for a free India and for the decision of communal issues.

*June 2, 1936*

# 24

# THE CONGRESS AND MUSLIMS

## I

Mr. Jinnah has in a recent utterance taken exception to my saying that essentially there were only two parties in the country—the Government and the Congress--and he has reminded me that there was a third party and that was the Indian Muslims. In the course of this speech he has made some remarkable statements. I am rushing about from place to place in Behar and can find no time to give the careful consideration which Mr. Jinnah's speech deserves. But the importance of what he has said impels me to steal some time from an exhausting programme, after a very heavy day's work, to offer a few remarks.

Mr. Jinnah, it seems to me, has said something which surely is communalism raised to the $n^{th}$ power. He objects to the Congress interfering with Muslim affairs in Bengal and calls upon the Congress to let Muslims alone. This objection and demand bear a strong family likeness to what Bhai Permanand has often said on behalf of the Hindu communalists. Carried to a logical conclusion, Mr. Jinnah's statement means that in no department of public activity must non-Muslims have anything to do with Muslim affairs.

In politics and social and economic matters Muslims must function separately as a group and deal with other groups as one nation deals with another. So also in trade unions, peasant unions, business, Chambers of Commerce and like organisations and activities. Muslims in India are indeed a nation apart and those who forget this fact commit a sin against the Holy Ghost and offend Mr. Jinnah.

Again, who are the Muslims? Apparently only those who follow Mr. Jinnah and the Muslim League. When Maulana Mohammad Ali joined the Congress, Mr. Jinnah tells us that he fought against the Muslims. It was a small matter that scores of thousands of Muslims were members of the Congress then and millions sympathised and coöperated with it. Being outside the fold of the Muslim League and not following Mr. Jinnah's lead, they can be presumed to be other than Muslims. Presumably, according to Mr. Jinnah, powerful Muslim organisations in the Punjab and in Bengal, like the Ahrars and the Kisan parties, being outside the fold of the Muslim League, are not really Muslim. We have a new test of orthodoxy.

What exactly Mr. Jinnah would like us of the Congress to do with the large numbers of Muslims in the Congress I do not know. Would he like us to ask them to resign and go on bended knee to him? And what shall I say to the great crowds of Muslim peasants and workers who come to listen to me?

All this seems to me extraordinary and harmful doctrine and most unjust to the Muslims. His reference to a 'third party' is also far from happy or complimentary to the Muslims.

Between British imperialism and Indian nationalism he would have them remain as a political group apart, apparently playing off one against the other, and seeking communal advantage even at the cost of the larger public good.

I am totally unable to think along these or any other communal lines, and with all deference to Mr. Jinnah, may I suggest that such ideas are medieval and out of date. They bear no relation whatever to modern conditions and modern problems, which are essentially economic and political. Religion is both a personal matter and a bond of faith, but to stress religion in matters political and economic is obscurantism and leads to the avoidance of real issues. In what way are the interests of the Muslim peasant different from those of a Hindu peasant? Or those of a Muslim labourer or artisan or merchant or landlord or manufacturer different from those of his Hindu prototype? The ties that bind people are common economic interests, and, in the case of a subject country especially, a common national interest. Religious questions may arise and religious conflicts may take place, and they should be faced and settled. But the right way to deal with them is to limit their sphere of action and influence, and to prevent them from encroaching on politics and economics. To encourage a communal consideration of political and economic problems is to encourage reaction and go back to the Middle Ages. It is an impossible attempt for it ignores realities.

The realities of today are poverty and hunger and unemployment and the conflict between British imperialism and Indian nationalism. How are these to be considered com-

munally ?

There are of course many groups and parties and odd individuals in the country today. But, historically speaking, the present contest lies between imperialism and nationalism. All 'third parties,' middle and undecided groups, etc., have no real importance in this historic sense. They have consequently no great strength and they function only in elections and the like and fade away at other times. The Congress represents Indian nationalism and is thus charged with a historic destiny. Because of this, it is the only organisation which has developed a vast prestige in India and the strength and will to stand up against British imperialism. Thus, in the final analysis, there are only two forces in India today—British imperialism and the Congress representing Indian nationalism. There are other vital forces in the country, representing a new social outlook, but they are allied to the Congress. The communal groupings have no such real importance in spite of occasional importance being thrust upon them.

Mr. Jinnah leads a party in the Legislative Assembly. The members of that party have shown the most remarkable independence of each other and of the party. Why is that so ? Because no common principle or policy binds them and at the touch of any real problem they break apart. That must also be the inevitable fate of communal parties.

There is no question of dictators and camp followers. The Congress is a democratic organisation with its roots deep down in the Indian soil. Its doors are open to every Indian who believes in independence. For it the dominant

issue is that of independence to enable us to get rid of poverty and the exploitation of the people. It may make mistakes but it tries always to think in terms of the nation and in terms of national freedom, and deliberately to avoid a narrower or a communal outlook.

What does the Muslim League stand for? Does it stand for the independence of India, for anti-imperialism? I believe not. It represents a group of Muslims no doubt, highly estimable persons but functioning in the higher regions of the upper middle classes and having no contacts with the Muslim masses and few even with the Muslim lower middle class. May I suggest to Mr. Jinnah that I come into greater touch with the Muslim masses than most of the members of the Muslim League? I know more about their hunger and poverty and misery than those who talk in terms of percentages and seats in the Councils and places in the State service. I have had vast Muslim audiences in the Punjab and elsewhere. They did not ask me about the communal problem or percentages or separate electorates. They were intensely interested in the burden of land revenue or rent, of debt, of water rates, of unemployment, and the many other burdens they carry.

As President of the Congress I have the honour and privilege to represent the innumerable Muslims throughout the country who have taken a valiant part in the struggle for freedom, who have suffered for the great cause of independence and who have stood shoulder to shoulder with others in our historic fight under the banner of the Congress. I represent the many brave Muslim comrades who still stand in

the front ranks of our forces and who have been true to the Congress through the strain and stress of past years. I represent the hunger and poverty of the masses, Muslim as well as Hindu ; the demand for bread and land and work and relief from innumerable burdens which crush them ; the urge to freedom from an intolerable oppression. I represent all this because the Congress represents it, and I have been charged by the Congress to hold aloft its principles and the torch that it has lighted to bring hope and strength and brightness to the dark corners of our land and to the suffering hearts of our people.

The Congress welcomes all coöperation ; it has repeatedly stressed the need for a joint front against imperialism. It will coöperate with pleasure with the Muslim League as with other organisations, but the basis of this coöperation must be anti-imperialism and the good of the masses. In its opinion no pacts and compromises betwen handfuls of upper class people, and ignoring the interests of the masses, have any real or permanent value. It is with the masses that it deals for it is concerned above all with their interests. But it knows that the masses, Hindu and Muslim, care little for communal questions. They demand urgently and insistently economic relief and, in order to obtain this, political freedom. On this broad basis there can be the fullest coöperation between all elements in the country who seek the good of the people as a whole and their freedom from imperialism.

*January* 10, 1937

## II

For various reasons the problem of increasing the Muslim element in the Congress has recently received considerable attention. This has been so both on the side of prominent Congressmen, Hindu and Muslim alike, and on the part of others who, though sympathetic, have hesitated to join the Congress. There is no doubt about it that Muslim India is in a state of ferment today. The Muslim masses inevitably think more and more in terms of common economic problems and common burdens together with others. As a reaction to these new currents certain prominent Muslims, connected with communal organisations, have tried to dissuade Muslims from joining the Congress and have even hinted at dire consequences and catastrophes if this should happen. I have no desire to enter into these controversies which tend to become personal and in which irrelevant issues are often raised. It is not therefore with a view to controversy that I issue this statement, but I do feel that clarity of ideas is desirable and the Congress position should be clearly understood. I find that even Congressmen sometimes fail to appreciate this and talk in terms of pacts and compromises with Muslims or other religious groups.

The Congress is a political organisation dealing also inevitably with economic problems, for these problems affect the masses of India more than anything else. The objective of the Congress is political independence, that is, the capture of power by the people of India, irrespective of their religion. Every Indian of the hundreds of millions who inhabit this country must be a sharer in this power and

must benefit by the new order that we strive for. For ultimately it is this order, which removes our crushing poverty and unemployment, which we work for. Subjection and poverty are the common lot of Indians whatever their religion might be; freedom and economic and cultural betterment must also be the common lot of all of us. In the struggle to obtain this the Congress offers a common platform to all, and because it thinks in terms of the masses and their betterment, it goes to them, organises them, advises them, seeks strength and guidance from them.

The Congress, being a political organisation, does not concern itself with religion or connected matters. But religion and culture being important matters in the life of many individuals, it is right that they should want to know how these are viewed by the Congress. Therefore the Congress declared at Karachi and subsequently, in the clearest language, that the fundamental and basic rights of all Indians must contain provisions for the free exercise of religion, for freedom of conscience, for the protection of the culture, language and script of minorities, and further that all citizens whatever their religion or caste or sex, were equal before the law and in regard to public employment, office, trade or calling. The franchise must be on the basis of universal adult suffrage.

This assurance has been repeated in the Congress election manifesto and is the basis of all Congress policy. It applies to all majorities and minorities alike and it is unthinkable that the Congress will ever vary it.

Having given this solemn assurance, the Congress

has nothing further to do with religious or cultural matters and it pursues its political struggle. In this political struggle it has gained great power because millions of people have sided with it, approved of its programme, and looked to it for deliverance from their thraldom and misery. That programme was a common programme for all Indians whatever their religious persuasions may be. The development of the nationalist movement has crystallised power in two opposing ranks and we have in India today two dominating forces: Congress India, representing Indian nationalism, and British Imperialism. I have often been made to say in the public press, owing to a mistranslation, that there were only two parties in India. That is manifestly wrong for there may be, and are, any number of parties, big or small, important or confined to a handful. But what I have said, and what I think is true, is that there are two principal forces in India today, that of the Congress and that of imperialism. Others incline during a crisis towards the one or the other, or are mere lookers-on and do not count. We have had big crises and conflicts in the past and, as is the way with nations and communities, we have gained strength and self-reliance thereby. Out of the fiery furnace of a nation's suffering and conflict, the Congress has steeled itself and risen higher and higher, strong in the love and strength of our millions. Those who kept out of it and relied on the feeble prop of an alien and vanishing government, remain themselves feeble, without self-reliance or strength, unable to charge themselves with the energy of a nation on the move.

Strength does not come to a nation or a community

from mere numbers, or special seats in the legislatures, or protection given by outsiders. It comes from within and from the coöperation and goodwill of comrades in a common cause. The minorities in India will not flourish by being spoon-fed from above but by their own merits and strength. Can anyone imagine that any majority in India can crush the brave Sikhs, small as they are in numbers? Only a lunatic can think that the Muslims can be dominated and coerced by any religious majority in India.

The time has gone by when religious groups as such can take part in political or economic struggles. That may have been the case in medieval times. It is inconceivable today; the lines of cleavage are different, they are economic. Therefore to think in terms of communal groups functioning politically is to think in terms of medievalism. And this is the reason why communal groups in India fail so dismally in the political field; they have and can have no common political or economic policy; they split up and are usually dominated by reactionaries. Having no inner strength they look inevitably to favours from the imperialist masters. And what are those favours? A few State jobs, a few seats in the legislatures. How does this affect the hunger of the millions or the unemployment of vast numbers?

Realisation of this is coming slowly to those who hoped for relief from their communal leaders and so they are turning more and more to the Congress, and thinking in terms of political and economic power.

We talk of approaching the Muslim masses. That is

no new programme for us although the stress may be new. That is part of our principal programme of developing increasing contacts with the masses, whether they are Hindu or Muslim, Sikh or Christian or any others. The religion of all these is their personal matter which the Congress guarantees. But we think of them not as religious units but as suffering units of the hungry Indian masses who cry loudly for succour.

It must be remembered that the Congress has always had large numbers of Muslims in its fold, and larger numbers have sympathised with its activities. Some of the most eminent of our national leaders have been and are Muslims. But it is true that the Muslim masses have been largely neglected by us in recent years. We want to repair that omission and carry the message of the Congress to them. Why do others object to this ? If they disagree with the political or economic policy of the Congress, they are at perfect liberty to place their policy before the masses. But it is to the masses that the appeal must be made.

This is important, the appeal to the masses. Our problems cannot be solved, we hold, by a few people at the top. And that is why we have lost faith in the old style All Parties Conferences, in a few persons, representing communal organisations with no common political background, meeting together and discussing and quarrelling. We have had enough experience of these in the past and that experience does not call for repetition. We are of course always willing to discuss our problems with all who earnestly desire their solution, whether they agree with us or not. But the

way to a solution is not through a so-called All Parties Conference.

Those who talk of the Congress entering into a pact or alliance with Muslims or others fail to understand the Congress or the new forces that are moving our people. We have already made a great pact amongst ourselves, amongst all who desire national and economic freedom, to work together to this common end. The Muslims are in this pact just as the Hindus and Sikhs and so many Christians. They are there as Indians, and if they have problems *inter se*, as they must have occasionally, they will discuss them and decide them democratically within the great organisation which has come to represent to such a remarkable degree the will of the Indian people. Is it not better and more dignified to do this than to seek favours from and take deputations to, our alien rulers who dominate over us, and seek to play off one against the other ?

When we have gained our freedom, that is the only possible and democratic way for us. And even now, in the course of our struggle for freedom, that is the only way.

Some people suggest that semi-communal nationalist parties should be formed, like a Muslim Congress Party. That seems to me a wrong course and one which will encourage communalism and injure the larger cause. Our experience of the Nationalist Muslim Party in the past was not a happy one. Such half-way groupings confuse the issue and the masses are perplexed. Those who disagree with the Congress will of course form their groups and parties. But those who agree should not stand on the doorstep ; they

should enter the nation's chamber and take full share in shaping the nation's policy. There are many today who talk vaguely of being Congressmen and of being in favour of independence. But they work through other and communal organisations and waste their strength thereby.

The crisis deepens and the people of India will soon have to make many fateful decisions. Already these petty and unreal problems, communal and the like, shade off into the background, and the real issues, pregnant with destiny, overshadow India and the world. What will our answer be, whether we are Hindus or Muslims or Sikhs or Christians? Shall we stick to our little ways, lost in a wilderness of pettiness? Or will we, united and firm of purpose, take the shaping of events in our strong hands and make the history of our choice?

*April* 4, 1937

## III

I have read Mr. Jinnah's latest statement with care. I agree with him that the Muslim League is a political organisation and often acts on the political plane. But because it is confined to a religious group it is like others of its kind, essentially a religious or communal organisation. I can fully understand and appreciate a religious or cultural organisation acting on a religious or cultural plane only. I can also understand a political organisation acting politically, whatever its views might be. But to mix the two is to create confusion and prevent the proper decision of any issue. Mr. Jinnah

tells us that the Muslim League is a political organisation and its policy and programme differ in vital respects from that of the Congress. The mere fact that a person is born to or professes the faith of Islam does not surely mean that he must also conform to the political policy and programme of the Muslim League. If he disagrees with that policy, as large numbers of Muslims do, he must inevitably seek some other political organisation whose policy and programme appeal to him. If he agrees with the Congress policy he will join it and function through it politically. That does not mean that he wants the disruption of Muslims. He is merely acting as politically thinking people act. Obviously there are great differences of political opinion *inter se* among Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Christians, Parsees, etc. Among each of these religious groups one may find Congressmen, socialists, anti-socialists, communists, liberals, direct actionists, revolutionaries, moderates, extremists, believers in different kinds of economic theory, supporters of the Douglas Credit system or any other system. These cleavages of political and economic opinion are rightly represented by political and economic parties in the public life of the country. But to form a religious or communal party, which also dabbles in political and economic matters, cuts across these real cleavages of opinion on live issues and thus is an unreal party in the political sense. Or else it partly represents, as the Muslim League or Hindu Sabha or Sikh League may claim to represent, a certain section of a religious group which holds by certain political and economic theories. But even this it does not do with clarity and precision as it is always talking in terms

of a religious group which, by its very nature, is a politically mixed one.

I do not agree with the policy of the Liberal Party but I can understand it. It is a political party which bases its appeal on a certain political theory and its doors are open to all, Hindus or Muslims or others, who agree with that theory. Not so the Muslim League or the Hindu Sabha.

Mr. Jinnah has failed to understand me if he thinks that I am out to destroy other parties. But, because I believe in the Congress policy and programme, I try my hardest to push that forward and to convert all others, Muslims, Hindus, Christians, Sikhs, etc., to that viewpoint. Mr. Jinnah, or the Liberals, or any other individual or group, are perfectly entitled to push their policy forward in the same way. Why then does Mr. Jinnah object to my working amongst the Muslims for the spread of Congress ideals? The objection is not political, it is communal, and hence the confusion of thought and action. When Mr. Jinnah talks of the Musalmans, or warns them to do this or that, he is not speaking politically but communally. He is presuming that all Musalmans must inevitably think on the same political lines and these should be in accordance with the policy laid down by him and the Muslim League. Surely that is a large presumption.

Mr. Jinnah thinks that the Congress policy is wrong and harmful. I think likewise of his policy. We differ. Let us agree to differ and work democratically for the spread of our respective viewpoints. I would gladly welcome Mr. Jinnah as the leader of a purely political party open to all

denominations and with a defined policy. Political and economic issues will then be placed clearly before the country and the people of the country, who will ultimately decide these issues, will be enabled to think about them on right lines. To appeal to Musalmans or Hindus as religious groups on political matters is obviously the wrong thing. It is the medieval attitude, when politics and economics were in the background, and it cannot possibly fit in with the modern world. It is because of this that I say that I find it difficult to think on communal lines.

It is very unfair of Mr. Jinnah to say that the Congress considers it utter nonsense to safeguard the rights and interests of the minorities. The very reverse of this is true. In so far as religious and cultural and linguistic rights are concerned (and these are generally considered to be the basic minority rights) these have been amply safeguarded by the Congress as far as solemn declarations can safeguard them. There may be other questions which require consideration, and certainly occasions have arisen in the past and will arise in the future, in this imperfect world, when political adjustments are desirable in regard to minorities. The Congress is fully alive to this and is always ready, when such occasions offer themselves, to help in bringing about such an adjustment. But political adjustments must be in consonance with a basic political policy. To have a relatively minor adjustment at the expense of fundamentals is not an adjustment; it is the uprooting of the whole structure, a complete loss of equilibrium.

The Congress does not and cannot accept the Communal

Award because it is a negation of our fundamental principles of democracy and of a united India. It is incompatible with freedom. But Mr. Jinnah knows that the Congress policy is to get it altered in coöperation with, and with the good-will of, the communities concerned.

When Mr. Jinnah says, quite rightly, that the Muslim League differs in vital respects from the Congress in political matters, does he expect the Congress, including the Muslims who agree with the Congress, to give up its policy, in deference to the Muslim League, a policy which has been a beacon-light to us and to millions in this country these many years, and for which so many of us have gone repeatedly through the valley of the shadow? Mr. Jinnah knows that in the hour of our trial when we faced the might of a proud empire, many prominent leaders of the Muslim League sought alliance with the die-hard leaders of the Conservative Party in England, than whom there are no greater enemies of Indian freedom. Are we to submit to them now, we who have refused to submit to the embattled power of that Empire, and who prepare afresh for fresh trials and tribulations in the struggle for independence which has become the life-blood of all our activities?

Mr. Jinnah refers apparently to my faith in socialism. It is true that I desire to put an end to imperialism all over the world and I look forward to the establishment of a socialist State not only in India but elsewhere also. I believe in a world order based on the principles of socialism, and I am convinced that only thus will the distempers and miseries that afflict us find final burial. But the Congress is not

committed to this creed or policy. Nevertheless the Congress thinks and acts in terms of the masses, Hindu or Muslim or other, seeks strength from them, and determines its policy with reference to them. Therefore it considers that even political adjustments with minorities will have a surer and more real basis if the masses are enabled to have their say in the matter.

Do I talk like a dictator or a sovereign authority? It is for others to judge. But may I venture to say that Mr. Jinnah when he objects to our carrying on our ordinary political work amongst Muslims, or issues mandates and warnings to Musalmans as a whole, regardless of their political opinions or affiliations, adopts an attitude which may, without impropriety, be called dictatorial?

*May* 2, 1937

## 25

## BURMA AND CEYLON

Burma has recently been politically separated from us and Ceylon has long functioned as a separate unit of the British Empire. But whatever the exigencies of British imperial policy might demand, India and Burma and Ceylon can never forget the cultural and commercial bonds that have tied them for thousands of years. The political shape of countries has changed repeatedly during this long span of years but our deep attachment has continued and will continue. It will continue, among other reasons, because today we have to face essentially the same problem and the same opponent. That opponent is British Imperialism and that problem is how to free our people. All over the world events are marching apace covering in a few short years the track of centuries, and imperialism, allying itself to fascism, struggles to maintain itself. But it struggles in vain, for the freedom of the peoples of India, Burma and Ceylon, as of the rest of the world, cannot long be delayed.

In this struggle between the mighty forces of imperialism and nationalism and social freedom, British policy is ever trying to weaken us by introducing fissiparous tendencies and by diverting our attention to minor conflicts which it encourages. We must beware of this and we must not per-

mit ourselves to become tools of British imperialism. The separation of Burma has an inner and wider significance which must not be missed. It is in furtherance of British imperial preparations in the East for the world crisis which already overshadows the horizon. Burma has special importance because of its soil. A little beyond it, Singapore with its strategic position and powerful naval base, commands the routes between the east and the west. Trincomalee in Ceylon has developed into a naval and air base of the first importance.

These are the dominating facts of the situation and behind and overshadowing them is the threat of world war. We must consider our smaller problems in relation to them.

Both in Burma and Ceylon cries have been raised about Indians exploiting the people of the country. Curiously enough those who are telling us about this most frequently are representatives of British imperialism and British commerce who have exploited our countries systematically and pitilessly for generations and reduced our people to a state of appalling poverty. They want to preserve this monopoly of exploitation and because Indian businessmen have entered into some competition with them in certain fields of activity, they have tried to embitter the relations of Indians with the Burmese and the Ceylonese. Conflicts are arising where none existed and tariffs and trade wars might naturally follow, as they are doing in the rest of the world. That would be the height of absurdity. If India put on a duty on coconuts from Ceylon, how would Ceylon fare ? Ceylon's trade with India is easily first on the list, so

also Burma. Any trade conflicts between us would inevitably injure all concerned.

But why should there be conflict? Not only do we have our long cultural background to unite us, but our political and larger commercial interests do not clash. Labour interests also do not come into any real conflict. It may be that certain trades come into occasional competition but they do not affect the larger interests much and such competition is easily capable of adjustment.

We want of course to protect our nationals wherever they might be. We want them to have fair play; we want the dignity of India to be respected in them even though they may be poor workers or coolies. We may not have the power to protect them effectively today, but we have the will and we shall soon have the power. But our conception of nationalism is not that of an aggressive racialism ignoring and overriding others' rights. We want peace and coöperation with our neighbours for our mutual benefit and advantage. We want to encourage trade and contacts and are opposed to the erection of trade barriers, except when unavoidable circumstances may force us to do so.

This general policy of peace and friendliness will govern our relations with all our neighbours and others who respect our rights and freedom. But Burma and Ceylon are more to us than neighbours; they are bits of ourselves, almost bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh. How can we turn against each other, whatever happens? Let them realise that we in India will have nothing to do with the vicious propaganda that separates and embitters. We recognise

fully that both Burma and Ceylon have their separate political entities and individualities. They have both the right to fashion out their own path, and whatever this might be, they will have the goodwill of the people of India. And I hope that my countrymen will never permit or tolerate the exploitation by them of the peoples of Burma and Ceylon. We have had enough of exploitation under British Imperialism. Let us all pull together and get rid of it.

I trust that the Burmese and the Singhalese will approach these questions from this wider point of view, and recognise that there is no essential clash between Indian, Burmese and Singhalese interests. We have lived in amity in the past and we shall continue to do so.

Six years ago I visited Ceylon and since then life has been hard on me, and it seems to me almost that an age has passed. But the memory of that visit is vivid in my mind and it freshens and delights me. How can I forget the love and welcome that I received from all classes of people in that island, whose beauty gripped my heart?

I have never been to Burma. But I hope to repair that omission and, if the fates are kind to me, I shall go there in the course of the present year and pay my homage to the people of Burma.

*March* 11, 1937

# 26

# INDIA AND CHINA

I am ashamed that physical illness should incapacitate me from keeping my promise and being present at Shantiniketan tomorrow for the inauguration ceremony of the Chinese Hall. It has not been so usually with me, and so I gave my word gladly and with full confidence that I would join in this great ceremony, great in the memories of the long past that it invokes, great also in the promise of future comradeship and the forging of new links to bring China and India nearer to each other. What a long past that has been of friendly contacts and mutual influences, untroubled by political conflict and aggression ! We have traded in ideas, in art, in culture, and grown richer in our own inheritance by the other's offering. Political subjection came to both of us in varying forms, and stagnation and decay, and at the same time new forces and ideas from the West to wake us out of our torpor. We have been struggling to find a new equilibrium, to rid ourselves of the forces that throttle us, to give expression to the new life that already pulsates through our veins. The whole world seeks that new equilibrium, but the forces of darkness are strong and in the name of fascism and imperialism and their allies seek to crush the spirit of man and all the art and culture that flow from it. But that spirit of man is

not easily crushed ; it has survived many a barbarous onslaught ; it will triumph afresh.

China and India, sister nations from the dawn of history, with their long tradition of culture and peaceful development of ideas, have to play a leading part in this world drama, in which they themselves are so deeply involved. And it is right that they should draw nearer to each other, seek to understand each other afresh and draw strength from their past and present. All understanding to be real must be based on the cultural and ideological background of a country. I welcome therefore the inauguration of the Chinese Hall, situated most appropriately at Shantiniketan, and I trust that it will be a real meeting ground of the best in China and India. I must offer my grateful thanks to the Chinese scholars and friends who have made the building of this Hall with its library possible. I earnestly hope that this Hall will lead to ever widening contacts between the two countries, and that Chinese scholars will come to India and Indian scholars will visit China, and thus set up an ever-flowing stream of mutual understanding which will help us both in the solution of the problems that face us.

*April* 13, 1937

## 27

## FAREWELL TO BURMA

What a magnificent welcome you have given me, men and women of Burma, Burmese and Indians alike ! I came as a messenger of goodwill to you from the Indian National Congress and our people. I expected friendliness and goodwill in return. But the affection that you have showered on me in such abundant measure has overwhelmed me, and now that the time has come for me to bid you goodbye, I am sad at heart at leaving you and the many precious friends I have made here during these crowded thirteen days. This fair land is pleasant and beautiful, but pleasanter and more delightful are the people of this country, their bright young faces, their women with the laughter in their eyes. We in India who have responsibility cast on us for the future of our unhappy millions have a heavy burden to carry and it is not always easy to put on a brave smile when so much suffering and misery and difficulty surround us. I came to you tired and weary in spirit, but your joyous enthusiasm removed that weariness and lightened the weight of the burdens that I have to carry. Your eyes told me, even more eloquently than your verbal assurances, of the comradeship that is ours. Who will dare to break that union, who will venture to tell us that we are apart from one another ?

The separation of Burma has come. What of it? What difference can this little thing, imposed upon us by foreign will, make to us or to the bonds that unite us, bonds of the immemorial past that have sunk deep into our consciousness, bonds of the present, of mutual self-interest and a common struggle for freedom, shining bonds of the future with all its hope and promise for our peoples? India, the ancient among nations, still lives and her youthful vitality in the present age has surprised the world. Even in her subjection and degradation, she has produced great sons and daughters, and dear to her children is this old mother of theirs, in spite of her failings and weaknesses. To Burma, her sister, she gave the most precious of her gifts two thousand years ago or more. Long ages afterwards, the chain of circumstance brought the same fate to us, the same subjection, and bound us closer together in sorrow and suffering. We shall come out of this valley of the shadow also together.

Indians have come and settled down in Burma in large numbers and some are prosperous but many are poor exploited workers and peasants whose lot is similar to that of the Burmese worker or peasant. Many an Indian has made this country his homeland, for others it is an adopted land. For both the prosperity of Burma spells happiness, the distress of Burma, misery and sorrow. More and more their interests are tied up with those of the children of the soil. How can differences of any moment arise between the two?

We in India claim that in all matters concerning us the interests of the people of India must be paramount and it is for them to decide ultimately what these interests

are. So also in Burma. The interests of the Burmese masses must be paramount and it is for them to make final decisions regarding their interests.

The world is in ferment today and vast problems face all of us. There is a continuing crisis everywhere and catastrophe looms over the horizon. How shall we confront these problems, for we ignore them at our peril? Little men and little countries lose themselves in the petty things of life and are overwhelmed and swept away when the big things come. But the wise and the brave look further and deeper and prepare their country for a high destiny. That destiny calls to us; the future beckons to both India and Burma. Shall we not answer that call, marching in step together through the trials that may lie in store for us, strengthening and heartening each other, and winning freedom for our masses together?

And so fare you well, dear comrades of the past and of today. May good fortune be yours and may all of us have the courage and wisdom and perseverance which our countries demand of us.

*May* 20, 1937

# 28

## A QUESTION OF MANNERS

For a variety of reasons I am considered 'news' by the world of journalism and 'stories' are frequently built up around me. To some extent of course all who dabble in public affairs, if they are prominently before the public eye, have a certain news value. And so I come in touch with large numbers of journalists and pressmen and I must say that I have always had the greatest courtesy and indulgence from them. Perhaps they found in me a kindred spirit, and indeed I feel a certain kinship with them, for I have something of the journalist in me. Here in Malaya, as elsewhere, I have found the same indulgence extended to me by the press.

Some criticism has been addressed to me and sometimes what I have said or done has not been approved. I refer to this in no spirit of irritation, for I like criticism as it helps me to look at myself through others' eyes, to consider a question from various viewpoints, to try to think straight in the tangled web of modern life. And if a newspaper will not criticise, who will? That surely is one of the principal functions of the public press, and the press of today has a tremendously important part to play in public affairs.

I have been accused of a breach of etiquette, of a lack of

good manners, of discourtesy to a host, of not behaving as I should have behaved. I am inevitably a partisan in such matters, and howsoever I might try to consider them impersonally and objectively, my sub-conscious self would incline me to partiality. Still I examine my own behaviour and try to discipline my actions and spoken words. It would not be surprising if an unending succession of crowds and functions resulted in a tension of the nerves and this led me astray occasionally. I live a strange, abnormal life.

How far have I been guilty of these various misdeeds? I have wondered to what extent these accusations were due to the strange novelty to Malaya of what I did or said. Into the pleasant though superficial drawing room atmosphere I came with the dust of the field and factory and market place sticking to me, and my appearance or manners were not in keeping with the notions of the drawing room. Elsewhere the drawing room and the country house have ceased to dominate the scene and the world of reality outside is continually knocking at their doors and sometimes pushing itself in. I came to Malaya with no particular intention of meeting crowds and addressing them, but rather for a pleasant and peaceful holiday in soothing tropical scenery. But the crowds came to me and enveloped me, and their shining eyes and abundant affection found an echo in my heart, and I told them of what they yearned to hear, of our struggle in India, of our hopes and fears, of the new strength and self-reliance that was ours, of our determination to put an end to poverty and unemployment, of the long night that must pass away before the coming dawn.

The crowds that came had not been trained in the manners of the drawing room, and if the arrangements were not ample enough there was much pushing and disorder. And when I adopted other methods to end the confusion, some people thought that I was merely losing my temper. Much of the confusion was due to the fact that many could not see me. I mounted a table to enable these persons to see me. Or on other occasions I pushed my way through the crowd to ease the strain at a particular place where the pressure was great.

I mention these trivial matters because the criticism of these throws a light on other and more important accusations. Something novel happened to which some of the journalists present were not accustomed; they misinterpreted it or resented it.

So also with my speeches. There was occasional misreporting as the reporter had apparently not understood my point. But that is a minor matter. The real thing was that my point of view was novel to many. They had probably heard of it but not appreciated it or attached importance to it. And now that it came pointedly and unadorned they were taken aback. They asked me straight questions; was I not to give them straight answers? That indeed would have been a discourtesy to them and to the public.

In my speeches I tried to deal with the Indian problem as scientifically as was possible within the limits of the simple language to be used to large and mixed audiences. I should have liked my critics to point out where my argument went wrong. That would have been more helpful than a vague

criticism or resentment. Are we out to understand problems in order to solve them, or to run away from them because we do not like them? I criticised the role of British Imperialism in India and I pointed out that Indian nationalism was struggling for independence. That is the very basis of our freedom struggle and it would be absurd for me to talk of India if I did not make this clear. People may differ from us; they have every right to do so. But the question is whether important and vital facts should be suppressed because they hurt the tender susceptibilities of the people in the drawing room. For my part I have no liking for the *robots* who have no will of their own and whose sole function is to echo the words of those in authority. Nor should constituted authority itself encourage them over much if it has vision and wants to keep in touch with reality.

I am asked if I am anti-British, anti-this, anti-that—questions which show that the questioner is far from understanding the problems of our time. We have grown beyond this anti-stage, I hope, and think of our national and international problems on broader and more fundamental lines. Why should I be anti-British, if by British is meant the British people? I owe a good deal to them personally, I am attached to their language and literature, I have many friends among them. But I am against imperialism and empire, wherever they may exist, because I think they come in the way of the world's progress.

If we are not just satisfied with things as they are—and is there any intelligent or sensitive person who is?—then we must try to understand as dispassionately as possible the

world's problems and throw our weight on the side which seems to us to offer a solution. In Malaya with its abundant natural resources I have felt, strangely enough even more than elsewhere, the tragedy of the world. For Malaya came to represent to me for the moment the natural wealth of the world. With this great store that nature has provided us with, and with the enormous power to exploit these resources through science and industry, could we not make of this world of ours a paradise for all? And yet, in spite of all this present plenty and future promise of far more, we quarrel over trifles, and man exploits man and nation exploits nation, and the fearful prospect of international catastrophe darkens our lives. But the day will come when we shall find the way out of this complicated maze and coöperate with each other to the common advantage and advancement of man.

*June* 1, 1937

# 29

## INDIANS AND CEYLONESE IN MALAYA

A question has often been put to me as to the contacts that should exist between the Indians and Ceylonese in Malaya. An interview with me that has recently appeared in the press contains one or two statements in regard to this matter which are liable to create some misapprehension and so I should like to express myself clearly on this subject.

Nationalist as I am in regard to Indian freedom, I do not look upon contacts with other peoples from a narrow nationalist viewpoint. My very nationalism is based on an internationalism, and I am very conscious of the fact that the modern world, with its science and world trade and swift methods of transport, is based on internationalism. No country or people can isolate themselves from the rest of the world, and if they attempt it, they do so at their peril and the attempt is bound to fail in the end. I do not believe in a narrow autarchy. But the internationalism that I look forward to is not one of common subjection, imposed from above, but a union and a coöperation of free nations for the common good. It is this kind of world order that will bring peace and progress to mankind.

Force of circumstances make us in India act and think on the nationalist plane. That is inevitable for all Indians

wherever they might live, for our primary objective must be national freedom. But I want them to develop at the same time the international habit of mind and to develop contacts with other countries and peoples. We have a big part to play in the future. Let us prepare ourselves for it.

These contacts will inevitably be greater with those countries and peoples with whom we have common interests and whose world policy might ultimately coincide with ours. Thus I think that India and China have a great deal in common and their future coöperation will not only be advantageous to both, but of benefit to the world at large.

I have therefore urged upon Indians in Malaya to develop the closest coöperation with the Malayans and the Chinese as well as others living in this country. The Ceylonese are nearer to us in many ways than any other people outside India and it is only natural that our association with them should be close. I make no distinction in this matter between the Jaffna Tamils and the Singhalees or other Ceylonese. India has been a kind of elder sister to Ceylon for long ages past.

This should be the general outlook of the Indians here. But it is obvious that coöperation to develop on sound lines must be based on some common policy. A so-called coöperation mainly thinking in terms of jobs or privileged positions for a few persons is not true coöperation; it is nearly allied to jobbery and I am not interested in it. Strength comes to a community from self-reliance and not from a few State jobs that might be given to it. Even the State jobs come ultimately more to those who have this strength and self-reliance.

Coöperation must also be both in ill-fortune and good fortune. To share in the good fortune and to exploit the other's ill-fortune is not coöperation and does not enhance the good name of a community.

If this basis for working together is accepted, and I do not see how any person can reject it, then there should be no difficulty in the fullest coöperation.

There seems to have been some argument as to whether Ceylon Tamils should be classed as Indians. Some such interpretation has apparently been given in Malaya. This seems to be wrong in fact and likely to create a split among the Ceylonese which is not desirable. It is obviously not true in the political sense of the word. But a more important consideration is that such an interpretation will encourage a cleavage among the people of Ceylon and we should be no parties to this. We want the people of Ceylon to weld themselves into a strong unit, which will live in close coöperation and friendship with India. If the Ceylonese and Indians are to be classed together for any purpose we have no objection. We would welcome this as we would welcome an even larger association. But let this be done in a straight way by calling them Indians and Ceylonese and not by way of subterfuge or forced interpretation.

In regard to the children of the soil, it is right that their interests should have precedence over others. But if Indians or others are born here and have made Malaya their permanent home, why should they not be considered also as children of the soil?

*June* 2, 1937

# 30

## INDIAN LABOUR IN MALAYA

Almost the first question put to me by journalists, on my landing in Malaya, was about Indian labour conditions here. Again and again this question was repeated. It was a pertinent question for Indian labour has come here in large numbers and their present condition and future must demand the attention of the people of India and of the Malay Peninsula alike. I did not answer that question for I was not competent to do so. I had not seen these labour conditions for my self and I had not read much about them. Some officers of the Labour Department of Government met me in various places and I had every courtesy from them and offers to show me any place that I wished to see. They were good enough to send me some Government publications and Mr. Srinivasa Sastri's report on Indian labour conditions in Malaya. I am sorry that, owing to my heavy programme, I could not take advantage of those courteous and friendly offers, except to visit some labour lines in Singapore and Penang. Many of my countrymen here were also desirous that I should acquaint myself personally with labour conditions.

The responsibility for not paying these personal visits of inspection is thus largely mine. The fault certainly is not of the Labour Department or of friends here, and I may not

therefore speak with any authority about the actual conditions in which Indian labourers live. Nor indeed would I have been able to do so even if I had paid a few visits of inspection. The problem is a much deeper one requiring careful study and it is this basic aspect that interests me especially.

I had occasion to discuss labour questions with officers of the Labour Department and with others, and during my brief stay in Port Dickson I have read some literature on the subject, including Mr. Sastri's report and the Central Indian Association's memorandum on it. I have also met a number of Indian labourers and seen crowds of them at various meetings.

All this would not entitle me to form final opinions about the living conditions and certain other specific problems discussed in the numerous reports. But behind these specific problems lie more important considerations about which even a new comer and a layman may have something to say.

The first line of enquiry that suggests itself to me when I consider labour conditions in any country is about labour organisations. Are there any trade unions or other worker's organisations ? Are they more or less independent or are they of the kind that are called company unions ? Are they strong enough to protect the interests of the workers ? What is the law on the subject ?

Through generations of conflict and suffering in the industrial countries of the West, labour has learnt this primary lesson : that only by organising itself and developing its own strength through unions, can it hope to safeguard its interests

and advance them. It has to contend against the organised power of the modern capitalist machine; it has to bargain with this power. What chance has poor labour got in this tussle unless it has unity and organisation at its back also? When we speak of trade unions we think invariably of workers' unions. But Chambers of Commerce and Planters' Associations and other employers' organisations are as much trade unions as any labourers' union. They have great financial resources at their back, intelligence and education, usually the support of the State, and the power to impose their own terms by threat of dismissal, involving starvation and misery. This has nothing to do with the merits or demerits of individual employers. It is a group or a class we have to consider which inevitably thinks in terms of that group's advantage. The strongest of workers' unions cannot face the employers' unions on equal terms. Unorganised workers are helpless before them.

The State (speaking in terms of a capitalist State) may help the workers' cause to some extent and protect their interests occasionally. But the State can seldom do much if the workers themselves are weak and disorganised. The best of the State's officers, who sincerely desire the betterment of labour, will be unable to meet or check the organised might of the employers who often have a dominating influence over the State. Sometimes it may be said that these employers and financiers are, for all practical purposes, the State. But even apart from this direct control or influence, there are other indirect but equally important, influences at work. The high officials of the State belong to the same

class or group, educationally, socially, culturally and economically, as the controllers of capital and labour, and inevitably it is easier for them to think in terms of that class.

Long ago Disraeli wrote about the two worlds, the world of the rich and the world of the poor, and how they were entirely apart from one another, with next to nothing in common. He wrote about the English people in nineteenth century England. How much more is that applicable today in other countries. And when one adds to this the difference of race and language and an entirely different cultural background, the distance separating the two becomes vast. There may be sympathy and goodwill but it is difficult to understand even intellectually the other's viewpoint. Far more difficult is it to have an emotional awareness of the other's feelings, and it is only this that brings true understanding.

Even if the efforts of the State are helpful, and they undoubtedly are so sometimes, they are of the benevolent parental type, which do not encourage self-reliance and inner strength. To advance a community, self-reliance must be encouraged, and therefore an essential condition for the betterment of the workers is the promotion of trade unions and workers' organisations. The State itself will be able to do more for labour then than otherwise.

At present, so far as I know, there is little in the nature of labour organisation in Malaya. I was told however, and I was glad to hear it, that the Labour Department would welcome the formation of trade unions. I was told so in the course of a discussion about last year's strike of Muni-

cipal workers in Singapore. In this strike, I understand, that the Labour Department supported the strikers' demand for a higher wage. The strike was partially successful and wages were increased though not to the level asked for. The Labour Department is still urging, I believe, that the full demand of the Municipal workers be agreed to.

I hope therefore that every effort will be made to develop workers' unions in Malaya.

But what exactly are we driving at when we talk of labour and its future? Is it just to maintain a large force of labour, with a certain minimum degree of security and comfort, ever supplying larger dividends to industry, but with no other vital change in their condition? Or do we think in terms of raising them educationally, culturally and economically ever to higher levels, and making them true citizens of the country they live in and of the larger world? Surely only the second alternative is worth working for, and it is the only possible way if one takes a long view. The rapid and progressive growth of the machine technique in industry, a growth which means ultimately greater production of wealth and higher standards for all, has strangely resulted in paralysing industry to some extent in the most highly developed industrial countries of the world by increasing unemployment and lessening purchasing power. The growth of man must keep pace with the growth of the machine or else both will go under.

So used were we in the past to a lack of the good things of life that we built up an economics of scarcity. When plenty came we thought and acted in the same way, and even

went to the extent of destroying large quantities of commodities and restricting production to fit in with our out-of-date economics. It was an astonishing spectacle only possible in our topsy-turvy world, and it was a foolish attempt, for we must live up to science and the machine and their inevitable consequences. Crisis came and slump and depression and we imagine now that we are out of the wood. But the conflict between an age of plenty and an economics of scarcity continues.

A socialist has a clear and scientific way out of this muddle. He would introduce an economics of plenty to fit in with this age of plenty. He would encourage production to its furthest limit, and he would produce for consumption and not for profit, and all the profits of industry would go to the community, ever raising its standards as the wealth of the country increases. There is no limit to this process as there is no limit to the progress and advancement of man. Private monopoly would be avoided and wages and salaries would be so adjusted as to give enough purchasing power to the community to consume all the goods produced. There can then be no unemployment and there can be no trade slump.

But socialism is a far cry in Malaya today. Let us think in terms of an intelligent capitalism. How did President Roosevelt try to meet the crisis that was strangling the United States? In order to revive a languishing trade and industry, he insisted on raising wages, shortening hours of work, and strengthened the trade unions and encouraged them to deal directly with the employers. The increased wages brought

fresh purchasing power to the masses and business revived and the wheels of industry went round. For under modern conditions of mass production it is essential to have mass consumption. Without the latter the former cannot continue, and for mass consumption the masses must have the necessary purchasing power provided for them. And ultimately this leads to far greater profit to industry.

In Malaya probably the labour population is never thought of as consumers. To some extent this is true today owing to the nature of Malaya's principal industries and the lack of other industries. But a closer analysis would demonstrate that the wealth and prosperity of Malaya would increase greatly if the purchasing power of the masses was continually raised.

Fortunately for Malaya, nature has blessed the country to an unusual degree and it has not suffered so far from the ills that afflict the world. Why should it not utilise this natural wealth to raise all the people who live here to ever higher standards, educationally, culturally and in other ways? Every investment of this kind pays itself back a hundred-fold in the fine human material that it produces. If England or France had the standards of life that prevail here and had these material resources, would they not use them to the fullest extent to raise the living standards of their masses, as well as their educational and cultural standards? A country is judged not by the few people at the top but by the masses at the bottom; a city is judged not by its few palaces but by its many slums.

Therefore I think that wages should be kept at as

high a level as possible. A maintenance level is not enough. Labour is at least as important, if not more so, as capital in the development of industry, and labour should share in the prosperity of industry, as it is made to suffer when industry languishes. In many countries industry is in a bad way and may find some difficulty in raising labour's standards. Not so in fortunate Malaya. Why then should not all the people who live in this country, and especially the labourers and workers, out of whose efforts wealth is created, benefit fully by this abundance? It is bad business to divert the abundance to unspent surpluses and abnormal dividends.

I do not know why the wage figure for 1928 has been made into something like an ideal standard for Indian labour. What mystic virtue attaches to that year or to that figure? Even the present conditions of industry patently permit a substantial increase. And I fail to see entirely why Indian labour should be paid less than Chinese or other labour. Apart from other and vital considerations which affect the Indian labourer and his present relatively low standard of living, there are national aspects of this question, and India must claim equality of status and wage with others.

It is perfectly true that in India the wages are often lower (though not always so) than the wages paid here. There are obvious reasons for that but we need not go into them here. Why in any event should that be a measuring rod for wages here? Why should we not take the standard of wages in England or America as a measure? And then it must be remembered that a person who leaves his home and goes to

another country expects and needs more.

These are general considerations which seem to me to apply to Indian labour here, apart from any particular aspects of the problem. But it would be highly desirable to have a close study and an economic survey made of the condition of Indian labourers. Such an enquiry would include family budgets and the whole question of indebtedness.

Labour has always attached great importance to the number of hours of work. The whole history of the labour movement all over the world is one long struggle to reduce hours of work. It is now well recognised that eight hours a day is the maximum desirable limit, and in some countries the working day is smaller. I think it is eminently desirable to reduce the working day to eight hours in Malaya.

If it is our purpose to raise the human material in the labour areas to higher levels, then education becomes a vital necessity. I feel that there is tremendous room for improvement in this respect and the fullest opportunities not only for primary but secondary education should be provided for.

It is our desire and settled policy in India to put an end to the drink evil. We are told, however, that the revenue from excise cannot easily be dispensed with and this excuse serves to continue a policy which saps the energy and vitality of the worker and impairs his efficiency. In Malaya at least this should be no reason for continuing toddy shops. The fear that 'Samsu' brewing may spread may have some basis, but surely this is no reason why a present evil should be allowed to continue.

One other matter I should like to mention. I entirely

agree with Mr. Sastri that the Kangani system of recruiting labour should go. I have heard much against it and nothing in its favour.

There are many other matters connected with Indian labour in Malaya which interest me. But this note has already grown unconscionably long and I must not add to it. One thing, however, I should like to stress. A nationalist government in India would take the deepest interest in Indian labour abroad. It would be interested because it would like to protect the interests of its nationals. It would also be interested because it could not agree to any conditions or status which were derogatory to the dignity of the people of India.

*May* 31, 1937

# 31

## TO MY COUNTRYMEN IN MALAYA*

During my brief stay in this green and pleasant land I have addressed many audiences and had my say about many matters. I have discussed the present condition of India and what we are doing there and I have ventured to suggest what Indians in Malaya might do. Inevitably they have been vague suggestions and generalisations, for specific problems can only be dealt with in detail by a person more acquainted with them than I could claim to be. On the eve of my departure from Malaya, as the train is carrying us to Penang, I am attempting to put some of these suggestions into more definite shape. I have already written separately about Indian labour here and the desirability of close contacts between Indians and others.

Indians here have three duties to face, three kinds of responsibilities to shoulder—their duty to India, their duty to Malaya, their duty to themselves. The three are not mutually exclusive ; they overlap and each helps the other.

Their duty to India is to keep in intimate touch with current events there, to take living interest in our freedom

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struggle, and to help it in such ways as are possible to them. Obviously they cannot do much from here, but for their own sakes they should try to swim in the current of national progress and derive strength and vitality from it. If they look forward, as they must, to share in the triumph when it comes, they must be prepared to carry some of the burdens also. Their future is after all intimately and irrevocably bound up with the future of India. On India's freedom depends their status, the protection of their interests, and the place they occupy in the world. How can they help? Financially of course. Also by observing our national days, by using khaddar, by the display of our national flag at Indian functions. Khaddar is not an economic proposition in Malaya. It must cost more than other imported cloth or silk. But it has become the symbol of our freedom struggle and of our association with the masses, and those who use it consciously show their allegiance to both these ideals of ours, which are in effect one. And if they pay a little more, let them remember that the money largely goes to poor Indian spinners and weavers.

All Indians could and should do this, whether they are local born or not. For the local born are as much children of India as others and India's freedom must be as dear to them.

Their duty to Malaya is to live in friendship and fullest coöperation with the children of the soil, with the Chinese, and with all others who live here. They must consider the interests of Malaya as their own, for Malaya has become their land by birth or adoption, and must work for the progress of this country in every way. The people of the soil

must feel that we come to coöperate with them and not to injure their interests in any way. If India is their first love demanding allegiance and sacrifice for her cause, Malaya is dear to them also ; and indeed the very love of India should lead them to friendship with these lands and their peoples with whom India has had such close contacts from the dawn of history, and whose interests are so nearly allied to hers.

Lastly, their duty to themselves. My first reaction here was not a very favourable one. I found too many small Indian groups functioning separately. There was no conflict between these groups but nevertheless, they weakened the community. Strength requires a larger unity comprising all these groups, all those who look to India as their common motherland. Therefore the primary need for Indians is to build up this larger unity organisationally and to develop contacts—social, political, business—between Indians from all parts of our homeland. To the extent that they succeed in doing this will they be respected by others and have their voice heard in matters of importance.

A larger number of Indians here belong to the labouring class and our future in Malaya is thus closely bound up with the future of Indian labour here. It is necessary therefore that middle class Indians should seek to serve the labouring masses in every way and remain in close touch with them, so that they may know their needs and wants and might help them in their struggle. I have suggested elsewhere the desirability of forming workers' unions. In cities probably these would be more feasible to begin with than else-

where. Far-sighted employers should welcome them for they can then deal with responsible organisations and bodies of labour rather than with a disorganised mass. Such trade unions need not be confined to Indian workers only for the cause of labour is not racial. Racial or purely national unions are apt to be exploited against each others. Therefore, as far as possible, unions should comprise all the labour in an industry.

It is the business of the State to provide free education and medical facilities for all. In a rich country like Malaya this is easily possible, but none the less conditions being what they are we must help ourselves where the State fails to perform its functions. For education is a vital matter for a community and all its future depends on the human material it produces and trains. In this matter the Chinese in Malaya have set a fine example by putting up innumerable up-to-date schools. Why should not the Indians follow? This is necessary from another point of view also. In the existing State schools the Indian languages are not taught, nor indeed has India any place in them. (For the moment I exclude the Tamil schools for Indian workers.) This means that our boys and girls grow up cut off from India and denationalised to some extent. In our own schools there would be an important place for Hindustani, our national language, as well as for the mother tongue of the students. Such schools, I would suggest, should cater for all Indians and should not be confined to one provincial or religious group. We do not want sectarianism in our education. Indeed if our schools are good enough and attract non-Indians, I would

welcome them.

For the present when even good schools are lacking, to think in terms of colleges is premature. But obviously we cannot end the education of our children at the school stage. It surprises me how limited are the facilities for higher education in this country in spite of its wealth. There is not a single university and only one training college and one medical college. Some young men and women may go abroad for higher studies—to India or foreign countries. But it is absurd to expect any considerable number to be in a position to go to other countries. Thus in effect the people of the country, Indians as well as non-Indians, have no opportunities to pursue their studies further.

Apart from general cultural education, technical and scientific training is essential for a country with such large mineral and forest resources. Otherwise it can only remain, as it is largely at present, a producer of raw material, and not one that makes the manufactured article. For expert work it will always have to seek people from abroad. This is a humiliating future for any country.

This question of higher and technical education is of course one for all the people of Malaya. It is not confined to Indians. But Indians should think of it and should coöperate with other communities to remove this strange and surprising lack of the most essential condition of modern progress.

Something that I feel should be done almost immediately is for Indians to open public libraries and reading rooms, providing Indian newspapers, journals and books. To

begin with, reading rooms should be opened, as these are not costly, and gradually libraries should be built up around them. I am told that some of the Indian Associations get newspapers from India. This is not enough. The reading rooms should be open to the public, including non-Indians, who should be invited to interest themselves in Indian affairs. Such reading rooms and libraries would go some way to keep the Indian population of Malaya in touch with current events in India.

There are, I believe, some Indian-owned newspapers in Malaya which give Indian news. Such newspapers are desirable both in the Indian languages and in English. Newspapers are the ears and voice of a community. Without them a community is deaf and dumb and consequently helpless and powerless. Therefore I hope that our countrymen will build up high class and secure newspapers and journals.

I have recommended strongly that Indians here should take to khaddar wearing. For this purpose khaddar depôts should be opened where good and reliable khadi can be obtained without intermediate profiteering. The All India Spinners' Association or its branches should be consulted about this. These khaddar depôts might also stock other Indian goods.

These are some suggestions which I make for the consideration of my countrymen and countrywomen here. I would add that in all these matters we expect Indian women to take a prominent part. Ours is not just a men's movement in India. Women have played and are playing a brave and outstanding part in it.

In ending this article I should like to remind all my countrymen that if they wish to share in the honour and privilege of being India's children, they must be prepared to shoulder the responsibilities that always accompany privileges. Wherever in this wide world there goes an Indian, there also goes a bit of India with him, and he may not forget this or ignore it. By his actions India will be judged. He has it in his power to some extent to bring credit or discredit to his country, honour or dishonour. Let him keep this in mind always and let him bear himself with dignity in good fortune and ill fortune alike. India wants freedom and friendship with the world, and for that we labour; we are no humble suppliants for anybody's favour. We are no citizens of a mean country, but of a noble land with a great past and, let us hope, with a greater future. That future beckons to all of us. Who will not answer that call?

*June* 4, 1937

## 32

## FAREWELL TO MALAYA

For thirteen days I have wandered up and down the land of Malaya, enchanted by its beauty and charm. The spell of the country held me in its grip, and though great crowds came to welcome me and I talked to them of many things, my mind could not get rid of that spell and my eyes were always seeking to take their fill of this green and pleasant land where it is always afternoon and the troubles and conflicts of the world seem far away. And now it is time for me to go back to my homeland to face the heavy tasks and shoulder the responsibility that fate and circumstance have cast upon me. I go with regret, but I carry back many treasures with me—the memory of this beautiful country so richly endowed by nature, and the far more precious memory of the love and affection that have been showered upon me in such abundant measure. To my own countrymen here of all classes, from the labourer in the field to the merchant or professional person, I find it difficult to express my gratitude. Between us there need be no formal and superficial expressions of thanks, but rather a deeper understanding of each other, and, I hope, a deeper appreciation of each other, bound together as we are by the strong chain of common ideals and objectives. It was this great cause,

which I represented to them, that brought them in their tens of thousands to welcome me and which evoked that tremendous enthusiasm which we have seen and felt. It is this cause for which we live and which we shall see triumph. But the welcome that I received came from others also, from the people of the country, the Malayans, and the people of China who live here in such large numbers, and from the Ceylonese who are so near akin to us. To them all I am most grateful. From yet others I had every courtesy, from the press, from such government officials as I came in contact with, and from the police during my meetings and processions. I wish to express my gratitude to them.

I came here tired and I have had a strenuous time here, except for a brief spell of peace at Port Dickson. But this country and its generous and hospitable inhabitants have refreshed me and I go back rich in mind and fitter in body. This memory will endure for long and cheer me in the days to come.

And so goodbye Malaya, or as I would prefer to have it, *au revoir*.

*June* 4, 1937

# 33

## BACK HOME

It is good to come back home after six weeks of continuous wandering, good to see familiar sights, familiar faces, to rest for more than a day or two in the same place. Some have the *wanderlust*, and I have it myself in some measure, and I love to get out of the old rut and cross mountains and seas and make acquaintance with new countries, new people. And when one may not do this, as alas too often I may not, I give rein to my imagination and we take long and improbable journeys and seek adventure in distant countries. But the old rut calls us back and we return to the day's routine.

So I was back from Burma and Malaya. There were numerous formidable files awaiting me, and a crowd of letters to answer, and questions and problems which a great organisation has continually to face. Pressmen surrounded me—what had I say to this or that ? Had I seen some statement or other ? Was Congress going to form ministries ? And so on interminably. Fortunately I knew little about these various statements and pronouncements and I felt some difficulty in re-adjusting myself to the old world which I had left but six weeks before. Before my eyes floated still the Shwe Dagon pagoda glistening in the morning sunlight,

and the palm trees swaying in the pleasant land of Malaya.

Back to the files and the letters. A summer school has been raided and the lathi has felled down many people. The Jute strike is over but the grievances of the jute workers continue. The workers in a match factory of the Swedish trust have been long on strike and are being ill-treated. The problem of the detenus. A Congress committee has been suspended and protest and counter-protest have poured in. Appeals from district committees against certain orders of their provincial committees. There is an interruption and fifty kisans appear on the scene full of their troubles. They cannot be ignored.

Back again to the files. Should kisan organisations be started or should we concentrate on making kisans members of Congress committees? What should be the relation between the Congress Committee and the Kisan Sabha? Am I in favour of functional representation? Telegrams pour in protesting against the choice of a candidate to contest a by-election. A long distance trunk call on the telephone comes from South India. Visitors, visitors with nothing worthwhile to say, wasting time. An occasional visitor who is interesting taking up more time. And all the while the Shwe Dagon pagoda floating in the air and the gem palace of Mandalay and laughing men and women in gay attire wandering by.

Back to work. Financial matters, confusing and troublesome. Cases of disciplinary action. Some hard ones but discipline has to be maintained in an organisation. Mass contacts, what progress is being made in the villages?

What with Muslims in towns and villages ? Letters in approval of our new activities, letters in criticism. Are the Congress members of the legislatures working in their constituencies carrying the message of the Congress ?

How hot it is and the paper one writes on sticks to the hand : And how pleasant it was by the sea-side in Malaya with the tide lapping the beach and the palm trees and the graceful areca-nuts fringing the shore.

A conference with colleagues in the office. Cablegrams from abroad. Discussion on foreign affairs. Zanzibar-Indians overseas. Visitors, visitors—hell ! Why will so many people come when there is so much to be done ? But some are old colleagues and though what they say may be unimportant, they are valued comrades and may not be ignored. Strangers come and who knows whether their business is important or not ? Peasants come and who can turn these helpless ones away without a word of cheer ?

The situation on the Frontier—air-bombing and kidnappings, a curious mixture, and the larger question being somewhat hidden by communal feelings on either side. When will people behave like grown-ups ? How childish all this is and religion, as of old, warps the mind and confuses the issue.

A note on Congress work in the Punjab, a complaint from Bombay which takes up time. Visitors asking me to visit their districts or attend conferences.

Will the Congress accept ministries ? When will the Working Committee meet to consider this question ? Wise people, knowing far more than I do, announce that the

Committee is meeting within a few days. Evidently they imagine that our main preoccupation is to think about and discuss this question of ministries. They would be surprised to find how little this has to do with our work and how many other activities claim our attention. And those who question may be still further surprised if they had a glimpse into my mind.

For my mind goes back over the heads of the visitors and questioners and across the files to these six weeks that are gone past recall, days full of wandering in strange places, old world and new, crowded days. And pictures of the past come up before me when the beautiful palace at Mandalay hummed with play and laughter, and behind this hid many an intrigue and cruelty, and the rapid decay of an order that had lived its time. That gem palace is empty today, shorn of its gems, and only ghosts and memories fill its deserted halls. The teak roofs and pillars stand as of old, but they are dead wood and no more. The past they represent is gone for ever.

But the Shwe Dagon pagoda still towers in all its strength and beauty over the city of Rangoon and gives its ageless message to all who come under its spell. It shines in the morning sunlight and glimmers as the evening shadows fall, and we creep away from Burma reverently with this image of the soul of a people impressed on our minds and hearts.

*June* 19, 1937

## 34

## THE PRINCES AND FEDERATION

The constitutional deadlock that has arisen in India, immediately on the introduction of the new Constitution, has brought home to many the real significance of that constitution more than any amount of explanation and analysis. The Act may remain on the statute book yet awhile and shadow ministries function, backed by the British power. But all this is unreality, the land of ghosts and spooks. The reality of today is British Imperialism on the one side and Indian nationalism, as represented by the Congress, on the other. The Act has no place in the picture and so it is collapsing at the first touch. But we have to hasten this process at either end and so we must remember that the Federal part of it still raises its ugly head in the mists of the future. The Congress has directed us to fight this Federal structure and to prevent its introduction, for nothing is so bad in the Act as this Federal part.

What of the Princes ? We hear vague rumours of some agreeing and some doubting. These Princes, or nearly all of them, have acted during the past years of national struggle as the close allies of British Imperialism. Consistently they have been unfriendly to the national movement. Are they going to register another unfriendly act by join-

ing the Federation despite the unanimous opposition of political India to this structure? This will be a grave decision for them and they will thus align themselves even more than before in opposition to the people of India. There is a great deal of talk of the independence of the States and of the special treaties and the like. But the thing that is going to count in the future is the treaty that the people of India make with others. The Act will go inevitably with all its hundreds of sections and its special powers and its Federation. And so I would ask the Princes to consider this matter from this point of view and not rush in where wiser people fear to tread.

*May* 3, 1937

# 35

# BOMBING AND KIDNAPPING ON THE FRONTIER

Less than two months ago the British Government addressed a communication to the Spanish Government and the Insurgents in Spain asking both of them to refrain from bombing the civil population from the air. This remonstrance was sent to both the warring groups in Spain, but as a matter of fact the immediate occasion for it was the bombing of some of the towns in the Basque country, largely by German and Italian aeroplanes in the service of General Franco. For nearly a year, ever since the outbreak of the insurrection in Spain and its invasion by foreign forces, the world has been sickened by accounts of the barbarities perpetrated by the fascist-military clique in that unhappy country. Even so the bombing of Guernica, an unfortified city, with incendiary bombs, the killing thereby of 800 civilians, and the destruction of a large part of the city came as a terrible shock to the peoples of the world.

The British Government sent a pious note of protest and remonstrance; that is its chief function now in foreign affairs. And yet, just then, that same British Government was indulging in bombing from the air across the north-west

frontier of India. It was a strange and significant coincidence demonstrating in a flash the true nature and hypocrisy of modern imperialism.

How does the thing that is monstrous and horrible in Spain become justifiable in India or across her frontier? Whatever the so-called justification might be, frightfulness remains frightfulness, and there are certain standards of conduct which can only be ignored and set aside at peril to the civilisation and culture which the world has so painfully built up through long years of travail. All over the world people realise this and raise their voices against this new barbarism of bombing of civilians from the air. But fascism and imperialism, twin-brothers, are impervious to this widespread opinion, are wholly insensitive to the suffering of innocent human beings and to the crash of civilisation and the collapse of much that humanity cherishes. They carry on with their bombs from the air and destroy or maim impartially man and woman, boy and girl, and the child at the breast.

But humanity apart, let us examine this bombing business across the Frontier. The Congress has condemned it, as every sensitive person needs must, and it has further condemned the real motive force behind it, the so-called Forward Policy at the Frontier. We are told, however, that the British Government indulged in this bombing in order to rescue and protect girls who had been kidnapped. It is strange that even the kidnapping of girls should fit in with the Frontier policy of Government, just as communalism fits in with its larger Indian policy. Memories of how the kidnapping of

missionaries in various parts of the world helped in spreading the empires of various imperialist powers come back to us. Do we see a like process in operation at the Frontier ?

Now it is clear and beyond possibility of argument that the kidnapping of girls is a barbarous and inhuman thing and we cannot tolerate it. A government that cannot prevent it demonstrates its own incompetence. But it is also clear to every tyro in politics that air-bombing and military expeditions do not materialise unless there are important reasons of policy behind them. What that policy in India has been and is, we all know. For generations past it has messed about the frontier, ostensibly trying to solve the problem, in effect worsening it. One may argue whether this failure is due to sheer incompetence, or to a desire not to solve the problem, so that it may continue as a constant irritant and an excuse for periodical frontier operations and their inevitable reactions on Indian politics, or to both. But almost everybody is agreed that British policy on the Frontier has been a complete failure.

That is true on the face of it and yet that is too simple a statement to make, for the British people are no fools, and in framing their imperial policies they do not stop at the Frontier; they look far beyond it. In the old days they looked at the Tsar and his advancing empire; now the Tsar has gone past recall, but the same fascination forces them to look at the wide-flung Soviet territories which almost touch the frontiers of India. In this area of Central Asia they see threats to their Indian Empire, to the routes to India, to their world position. In the great crises that loom ahead, the

Indian frontier and the adjoining countries may well have decisive importance. It is true that the Soviet Union desires peace more ardently than any other country in the world. It is also true that the Soviet Union has tried hard to make friends with England. Yet the inherent antagonisms of the two systems remain and may become even more evident when crisis comes. We have seen how official England, even at the cost of minor interests and prestige, has indirectly aided the insurgents in Spain and supported the Nazi policy in Europe. The true kinship of imperialism with fascism affected British foreign policy more than many other considerations.

Thus the frontier of India and the lands beyond it are regarded by the Government as a probable theatre of war, and all their policy is directed to strengthening themselves there for war purposes. It is not a policy of pacification of and coöperation with the frontier tribes. It is ultimately one of advancing and occupying more territory so as to remove the theatre of war a little further away from their present base. The military mind, ignoring political and psychological factors, thinks only in terms of extending the bounds of an empire and thus making it safer from attack. As a matter of fact this process often ends in weakening a country or an empire. In India we have the military mind at work even in the civilian departments, for the civilian considers himself, and rightly, as much a member of a foreign army of occupation as the soldier.

All this has led to the so-called 'Forward Policy' at the frontier and because of this every excuse is good enough to be utilized for a forward move. It is with this background that

we must consider recent events on and across the frontier.

This Forward Policy becomes an intense preparation for war, for the great war that is prophesied for the not distant future. Apart from our opposition and strong objection to this Forward Policy in itself, we have to oppose it as such a preparation for war. The Congress has declared itself against India's participation in imperialist war and by that declaration and policy we must stand, not for quixotic reasons, but in the solid and permanent interests of the people of India and their freedom.

This Forward Policy has another aspect, a communal one. Just as the canker of communalism, fostered by imperialism, weakens and injures our public life and our struggle for freedom, so also the Forward Policy introduces that canker at the frontier and creates trouble between India and her neighbours. The policy of Britain at the Frontier has been alternately to bribe and terrorise the frontier tribes. That is a foolish policy, foredoomed to failure. That certainly can never be the policy of a free India towards them. The Congress has repeatedly declared that it has no quarrel whatsoever with our neighbours and that it desires to cultivate friendly and coöperative relations with them. Thus the Forward Policy of the British Government comes into direct conflict with our intentions and creates new problems which will be difficult of solution in the future. We must try to prevent that happening as far as we can, and this makes it necessary for us to hold hard to these fundamental principles of ours and not allow ourselves to be swept away by anything else.

I am quite convinced that the trouble at the Frontier can be ended by a friendly approach on our part, if we were free to make that approach. One man alone, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, loved on either side of the Frontier, could settle it, but under the British dispensation, he may not even enter his province. But even apart from Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, I can say with confidence that any approach by the Congress would meet with success. The chiefs of the frontier tribes would realise soon enough that our interests and theirs were not in conflict and they would coöperate with us in putting an end to the scandal of kidnappings and raiding expeditions. They would realise also that any other course than this would imperil the freedom that they have got, for British imperialism is determined to march further and further in pursuance of its Forward Policy. They play into the hands of this imperialism by giving it pretexts for action, and they create an unfriendly feeling in India by being parties to kidnappings and raids.

Let us examine briefly the recent occurrences on the Frontier. A village girl of about 15 or 16, Ram Kuar, apparently eloped with someone. This incident which was a purely local and personal affair and had no larger significance, suddenly assumed importance and excited communal passions in the neighbourhood. Candidates for municipal and Assembly elections exploited it, such is the virtue of communal electorates. The matter was clearly one to be settled privately or through a court in accordance with the wishes of the girl herself. Neither Hinduism nor Islam profited or suffered by such an incident. A court inter-

vened and it is interesting to note that the offence, for which the man who had accompanied Ram Kuar was ultimately sentenced, was based on the minority of the girl, she being just under 16. It was not a case of forcible abduction. The girl made various contradictory statements, as almost any girl might have done under such extraordinary circumstances.

Perhaps the incident might have ended there. But the Assembly elections gave it further life for the candidates made full use of it. This incident had nothing to do with Waziristan or the Frontier tribes. In Waziristan about that time some trouble had already started; this had no connection whatever with Ram Kuar's case. The Waziris were acting against the British Government for some reasons of their own. But the growth of communal passions, chiefly due to the propaganda about Ram Kuar's case during the election campaign, affected the Waziris also and this produced unfortunate results soon after the election was over. Four Hindu girls were forcibly kidnapped by some Waziris aided by local bad characters, presumably to avenge Ram Kuar. This was followed later by many cases of dacoities.

All this, as far as I can make out, is confined to Bannu district. It is worth noting that it was in this very district that Congress candidates fared badly during the Assembly elections. Where Congress is stronger no such thing has happened. Communalism and trouble go hand in hand.

These kidnappings and dacoities had two obvious consequences. The small minority of Hindus living in the rural areas were naturally terrified and confounded. What

frightened them most was the fact that, as a rule, their Muslim neighbours, who formed the large majority of the population, did not help them or protect them. Worse even than the actual occurrences were the rumours that were spread.

The second consequence was the advance of the Forward Policy. It had ample excuse now. Were they not going forward to punish those who kidnapped and committed dacoities on innocent and defenceless people? And so, claiming to be protectors of the weak, they marched ahead to fulfil the plans of British Imperialism, and they bombed right and left with goodwill, and left a track of ruin and misery behind them.

It is easy to understand the reaction of the small minority of terrified Hindus. It is also easy to understand the anger of the hill tribes who saw this ruin and death surrounding them and to some extent connected it with the communal controversy. Nevertheless it was and is folly for both to think or act in terms of communalism for both are victims of that larger policy of imperialism which marches on regardless of human suffering. For the Hindus in the Frontier province to support imperialism and its policy is not only the height of folly and cowardice but also to invite ruin for themselves. They cannot live and prosper in that province except in coöperation with, and with the goodwill of, their neighbours. For their Muslim neighbours in these villages to look on while kidnapping and dacoity take place almost before their eyes is to degrade themselves before the world. That is not the way of neigh-

bours. For the Frontier tribes to associate themselves in any way with kidnapping and raiding is to discredit themselves and to imperil their freedom.

Our policy is clear. We cannot approve of the Forward Policy of Government, because that is a discredited policy, because it strikes at the very root of our struggle for freedom, because it makes enemies of our friends, because it is a preparation for war, and because it is an imperialist policy. We can never tolerate the barbarity and inhumanity of bombing from the air. Our approach to the Frontier problem would be entirely different; it would be based on friendship and coöperation and respect for the freedom of others; and an attempt to find an economic solution for their difficulties.

But it is equally clear that we cannot tolerate kidnapping and dacoities and raids. Our sympathies must go out to those who suffer from these and it is our bounden duty to protect them. The surest protection, we feel, will come from a friendly approach and the removal of communal passions. Those who seek to feed these passions, either on the Hindu or the Muslim side, are friends of neither the Hindus nor the Muslims. The Congress has already done good work in the Frontier province in this respect and it is to be noted that the recent trouble has been largely confined to Bannu district where unfortunately the Congress organisation is weak. Dr. Khaṇ Sahib, the Congress leader in the Frontier province, has already given a straight and a brave lead and I trust that Hindus and Muslims alike will follow it. This is not a question of Hindu or Muslim, but of our

dignity and good repute, our intelligence and good sense, to whatever religious faith we may belong, and of Indian freedom itself.

*June* 22, 1937

# 36

# THE CONGRESS AND LABOUR AND PEASANT ORGANISATIONS

Since my return from Burma and Malaya I have received many letters from Congress Committees and Congressmen enquiring about the duty of Congressmen towards labour and peasant organisations. Should these organisations be encouraged or not ? And, if so, what form should they take, what relation, if any, should they bear to the Congress? These problems have arisen in many provinces and they require our serious consideration. Sometimes these problems are largely personal, sometimes they are mainly provincial, but behind them always there is the larger issue. In dealing with the local aspects of the problem, we must inevitably consider these peculiarities and even personalities. But we must be clear about the principles and the real issues before we lose ourselves in the forest of local detail.

How has this problem arisen? Not surely just because of a few persons acting in a particular way, but because of the dynamics of the very struggle in which we are engaged. It is a sign of our growth and the rising consciousness of the masses. For that growth the National Congress is mainly responsible and to it therefore must go the credit in a large measure for this new mass consciousness. The Congress has

worked for it and if success comes to it, Congressmen must not fight shy of this. Therefore this new development is to be welcomed even though it might bring some occasional complications with it.

These complications are to some extent inherent in the situation. The Congress is predominantly a political organisation representing the urge of all classes of Indians towards national freedom. A labour or peasant organisation is essentially a group or class organisation primarily interested in the welfare and advancement of that group or class. The Congress thinks and acts mainly on the political plane, the workers' organisation on the functional and economic plane. Yet the differences are not so great as one would imagine and the development of our struggle and of political consciousness bring the two close to each other and they overlap to a considerable extent. The Congress because of its close touch with the masses, because indeed it is by far the biggest mass organisation in the country, inevitably begins to think and act in terms of the economic grievances and disabilities of the masses, that is the workers, peasants and others. The labour and peasant organisations are forced to the conclusion that economic disabilities cannot be removed to any large extent unless political freedom is achieved and power comes to the people as a whole. Thus the two overlap and the joint anti-imperialist front grows up.

In any country under alien domination the political aspect always overshadows other aspects. This in itself would make the Congress the dominant organisation in the country, but this predominance has been further intensified

by the part that the Congress has played in recent years in our struggle for freedom. The Congress is thus today far and away the most powerful and the most widespread organisation in India; it has tremendous mass appeal and mass support; even the workers and peasants look up to it and are influenced by it far more than by their own class organisations. Other organisations are not even bad seconds. The Congress has obviously not achieved this mass influence and support by its political programme only. It has done so by its magnificent record of service and sacrifice, and by its direct approach to the masses and its increasing economic orientation, which is understood by those masses more than the purely political objective. It is interesting to compare the organisational and basic strength of the Congress in various parts of India. This strength varies directly with this economic orientation and mass contacts.

Thus from the point of view of our freedom struggle, both in its political and economic aspects, it is essential that the Congress should be strengthened. Everything that weakens it, weakens that struggle, and weakens even the workers' and peasants' movements, for neither of these is strong enough to make much headway without Congress support. It is the realisation of this fact that has brought about the demand all over the country, and from all kinds of quarters, for a joint anti-imperialist front under Congress auspices. Indeed the Congress itself is increasingly considered this joint front.

But in spite of all this the Congress remains, and has to remain, a national organisation and it cannot always repre-

sent the functional or class interests of the workers and peasants. It cannot function as a trade union or kisan sabha. In actual practice, where its contacts with the peasantry are considerable, it almost functions as a kisan sabha. The general tendency is for the Congress to develop into a predominantly peasant organisation and this process is likely to continue, but the leadership is bound to remain with the middle classes, chiefly the lower middle classes, so long as the Congress remains the National Congress and does not undergo a sea-change into something entirely different.

But these are speculations about the future and it is the present that concerns us. The outstanding facts of the present are : (1) the Congress must be strengthened because it is the only organisation which can lead us effectively to our goal; and (2) the rising consciousness of and ferment among the masses. If these two facts are correlated then we have a powerful movement which grows in strength and leads us to success. This is the basic reason for and the *raison d'etre* of the emphasis that is being laid on mass contacts. And be it remembered that this applies to all—Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and Christian masses. The cleavages of religious faith do not affect this programme at all. We talk loosely sometimes of Muslim mass contacts, but this is not a communal movement dealing with Muslims only. Our programme is identical in this respect for Muslim and Hindu or others; only in order to draw the attention of our workers to work amongst the Muslim masses have we talked of Muslim mass contacts.

Contacts with the masses can be of two kinds: direct

contacts by means of Congress members and village committees among the workers and peasants, and contacts with the workers' and peasants' organisations. The first of course is essential and needs no argument. Without it the second does not come into the picture at all, for the second can only be a corollary to the first. If the Congress has not got direct and widespread and deep contacts with the masses, it is bound to be influenced far more by the middle classes and will thus move away to some extent from the mass outlook which it has been its consistent aim to develop. It must therefore be the aim of every Congressman, and more specially those who have the interests of labour and the peasantry at heart, to develop these direct contacts by enrolling Congress members from the working classes and establishing village committees.

The second kind of contacts, that is some kind of organisational relation of the Congress with working class organisations, involving functional representation, has been discussed for some time past and is still being discussed. It involves a basic change in the Congress constitution and I do not know when, if ever, it will be given effect to. Personally I am in favour of the principle being admitted and given effect to gradually as the U. P. Provincial Congress Committee has recommended. This will not make much difference to begin with, as the workers' and peasants' unions, which are properly organised and capable of taking advantage of Congress affiliation, are very limited in number; and then the conditions for affiliation would be laid down by the Congress. But this question does not arise now as the

Congress constitution does not permit such affiliation or any kind of functional representation. It is a debatable question and we need not consider it further here. But this I should like to emphasise again; that those who are in favour of this change cannot bring it about from outside pressure; they can only do so by having a large enough Congress membership of workers and peasants who want such a change. If the outside pressure is at any time great enough to compel the Congress to bow to it against its own will, that will mean that the outside organisations are more powerful than the Congress, and if so why affiliate? But this is a highly unlikely contingency.

While it is true that this question is beyond our purview at present, we see something vaguely similar to it developing all over the country. This is the increasing coöperation in actual work between local Congress Committees and working class organisations. Sometimes even joint informal committees have been formed. Often enough the leading spirits of those local organisations are prominent Congressmen and so there is no difficulty in having this coöperation. But there is something more in it than this common link; there is the demand for this coöperation and a realisation that it is highly necessary.

Having laid so much stress on the importance of bringing in workers and peasants directly into the Congress, let us now consider the desirability of having separate working class organisations. There can be no doubt whatever that both industrial workers and peasants have, or ought to have, the inherent right to organise themselves. That is in the

nature of a fundamental right which the Congress has repeatedly recognised. There is no room for argument about it. The Congress has gone a step further and encouraged, in theory at least, the formation of such unions.

The case of industrial workers is clearer than that of the peasantry. It seems to me that any one interested in such labour must come to the conclusion that it is the bounden duty of the workers to organise themselves in trade unions, and for others to help them to do so. The trade union movement is the inevitable counterpart of modern industry; it must grow as industry grows. The Congress with all its mass contacts cannot function as a trade union, and the numerous workers' problems and conflicts that arise can only be dealt with by a trade union. From the point of view of our larger freedom movement also the organisation of workers in trade unions is essential for such organised workers develop strength and momentum and a high degree of political consciousness. Therefore Congressmen should help in the organisation of trade unions, and help also, in so far as they can, in the day to day struggles of the workers. There should be coöperation between the local Congress Committee and the trade union. The trade union is of course in no way within the Congress organisation, nor is it subject to official Congress control. But it must recognise that in political matters the lead of the Congress has to be followed and any other course will prove injurious to the freedom struggle and even to the workers' movement. In economic matters and those relating to workers' grievances, the union can have whatever programme it chooses, even

though this may be in advance of the Congress programme. Comgressmen, in their individual capacities, can and should be members or friends of the union and as such will of course give it their advice. But a Congress Committee *as such* should not try to control a trade union. Recently a case came to my notice when the Congress Committee tried to interfere with the elections to the executive committee of a labour union. This seems to me highly undesirable. It is unbecoming for a Congress Committee to do so and unfair to the union. It is bound to lead to conflict or to the conversion of the union into something which is not essentially a labour union. Congressmen, of course, who have served the cause of labour, have every right to take part in the affairs of the union.

Transport workers stand on exactly the same footing as other industrial workers and their organisation in special unions is highly necessary. It is also desirable to organise separately and functionally those workers in cities who carry on particular professions and whose economic interests are allied, such as tonga-walas, thela-walas, ekka-walas, mallahs (fishermen and boatmen), stone-breakers, petty clerks, press workers, sweepers, and the like. All these should of course be brought directly into the Congress fold as primary members, but they have special problems of their own, and a functional organisation gives them strength and self-reliance. It is easier for them later on to take part in Congress work. This of course presumes that Congressmen are in intimate touch with their special organisations and give them every help in time of need.

Mixed labour unions and mazdur sabhas in a city, consisting of workers from various trades and businesses are usually not successful. There is no functional unity amongst them, no common urge to coöperation or action; and if a political unity is desired the Congress is there to give it.

The important problem of the peasantry remains, and this after all is the most important of our problems. In the term peasantry I include the peasant proprietors as well as the tenants, the petty zamindars of the Punjab and elsewhere, the kisans of the U. P. and Bihar, and the *krishaks* of Bengal and Orissa. The same method of treatment will not apply to all these; there will be variations. But for the moment I am dealing with the Congress approach to their special organisations.

The Congress has fully recognised the right of the peasantry to organise themselves, and in theory the considerations I have advanced in favour of trade unions apply to them also. But there is a difference. It is relatively easy to organise factory workers and the like; they are a closely-knit group, working shoulder to shoulder and obviously suffering from common disabilities. It is far more difficult to organise the peasantry, loosely scattered and thinking almost always in terms of the individual and not of the group. We have experienced all these difficulties in the course of our Congress work, and thus we find that while Congress influence over the peasantry is very great, our organisational strength among them is much less. Tens of millions look up to the Congress and own allegiance to it, but the actual membership is counted in hundreds of thousands only.

Where Congress Committees are working effectively in village areas, an effective kisan organisation in the same area would largely overlap. There would be duplication of effort and waste of energy. The Congress itself is usually considered by the peasantry as their own organisation, and that is as it should be. Thus we find that in such areas separate kisan organisations have not grown up, although the kisan movement, as a part of the Congress and more or less within its fold, is strong. Where, however, Congress Committees are not functioning effectively in the villages, the gap is bound to be filled sooner or later by peasant organisations. The important fact to be borne in mind is that there is deep ferment in the peasantry all over India and a powerful, though partly unconscious, desire on their part to do something to get rid of their many burdens, which have become quite unbearable. Fundamentally this is due to economic conditions, but also there is the fact that the political movement, under the leadership of the Congress, has raised mass consciousness and made them resent many things which they used to bear silently like dumb beasts. They have also had a glimmering of the effectiveness of organisation and united mass action. So they are expectant and if the Congress call does not reach their ears, some other will, and they will respond to it. But the call that will find echo in their hearts must deal with their own sufferings and the way to get rid of them.

Because of this we find today all manner of strange people who have never had anything to do with the peasantry before, talking in terms of economic programmes and trying in their uncouth way to woo the peasantry. Even political

reactionaries of the deepest dye discuss unctuously agrarian programmes. Nothing will or can come of this, for far-reaching agrarian reform will never come out of political reaction. But this attitude of theirs shows us the way the wind blows.

This wind is blowing to the villages and to the mud huts where dwell our poverty-stricken peasantry, and it is likely to become a hurricane if relief does not come to them soon. All our political problems and discussions are but the background for *the* outstanding and overwhelming problem of India—the land problem.

The Congress has realised this in a large measure, and in spite of its political preoccupations it has laid down an agrarian programme. This programme, though it does not go to the root of the problem, is substantial and far-reaching and undoubtedly would bring relief to the peasantry. So far as I know, agrarian programmes drawn up by peasant organisations do not differ greatly from this. But the drawing up of a theoretical programme is not enough. It must be given the fullest publicity among the peasant masses and the organisation must reach the village. Further we must draw up definite schemes and proposals on the basis of this programme. These proposals will vary in different parts of India as conditions differ. It is the business of Provincial Congress Committees and Congress Assembly Parties to draw up these proposals. It is true that we may not be in a position to give effect to this full programme under present conditions. But we must be ready with it, to the smallest detail, so that when the time comes we can go ahead confidently and with speed

I have pointed out that present conditions in India and the very dynamics of the situation are leading to the organisation of the peasantry. The example of other countries points to the same conclusion. Therefore it seems to me inevitable that peasant organisations will grow up. Where the Congress is itself largely a peasant organisation separate kisan sabhas and the like will not function effectively as organisations, though they may offer occasional platforms for the ventilation of kisan grievances. Where Congress contacts with village folk are weak, the kisan organisation will develop more. In any event the growth of peasant organisations, weak or strong, will take place. What should be our attitude to them ?

We cannot say that there should be no peasant organisations. That would be contrary to the declared Congress policy; it would be wrong in principle, and it would come into conflict with that living movement and ferment that we see all around us. Nor can we say that a kisan sabha should be just a wing of the Congress, each member of the sabha being also a primary member of the Congress. That would be an absurdity, for under those conditions it is hardly necessary to have a kisan sabha. It seems to me also out of the question to place peasant organisations in the same category as the All-India Spinners' Association or the Village Industries Association. Such restrictions will not stop the growth of separate peasant organisations: they will only result in putting them outside the pale of the Congress and make them look upon it as a partly hostile body.

It is important that there should be no thought of

rivalry between the two for this will be injurious to both, more specially to the peasant organisation which is bound to be much weaker. If large numbers of peasants are direct members of the Congress and leading Congressmen are interested in the peasants' grievances, there will be no rivalry and in effect, though not organisationally, the peasant organisation will be a kind of wing of the Congress.

There are of course difficulties in such vague contacts and possibilities of friction. These difficulties are inherent in the situation and we have to face them. The more real our politics are, the more they deal with the problems of life and the many facets of a vast and complex and dynamic movement, the more we have to face fresh problems and adjust ourselves to changing situations. For life itself is complex and everchanging. Any advice I may give today on this or any other subject may not hold good some time later for conditions may change.

And then principles may be good but it is not always easy to apply them in practice. Thus we find today that sometimes the kisan sabha platform is used in opposition to the Congress. Sometimes political or communal reactionaries try to do so; more often, some Congressmen who do not approve of the local Congress Committee or its office-bearers find the kisan sabha platform a convenient place from which to attack them. A rival Congress group thus may exploit another organisation to gain power in the Congress itself. Thus the kisan sabha sometimes becomes a temporary home for the recalcitrants of the Congress, or even those against whom disciplinary action has been taken by

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Congress Committees. I have had reports of kisan conferences being organised within a couple of miles of a District Political Conference, on the same day and at the same time. This was intentionally done to injure the Congress Conference and attract some people away from it. I have further had reports of processions organised to interfere with Congress Conferences, of slogans offensive to the Congress being shouted there, of Flag conflicts being deliberately engineered.

This kind of thing is highly objectionable and all Congressmen must oppose this folly and this exploitation of the kisan movement in the interests of particular groups and individuals. It does not injure the Congress ultimately, except in so far as it produces confusion in the minds of the unsophisticated and simple-minded peasantry. It injures far more those who indulge in such practices. I have previously written about the Flag and I want to repeat that any attempt to dishonour the National Flag, by whomsoever committed, cannot be tolerated. We have no grievance against the Red Flag. For my part I like it and honour it as the symbol of the workers' struggle and sacrifices. But it is grossly unfair to that Flag to treat it as a kind of rival of the National Flag.

Nor can we tolerate direct attacks on the Congress and offensive slogans. Persons who indulge in them do grave injury to the cause they claim to have at heart. This of course does not mean that criticism of Congress policy is not to take place. Full freedom of criticism is as the breath of life to living and growing organisations.

All such incidents have a local significance and are

usually connected with local affairs. They should be dealt with locally or, if necessary, reference can be made to the A. I. C. C. office. When any Congressman indulges in persistent attacks on the Congress or in activity which is definitely harmful to Congress work and prestige, his case should be considered separately and referred to the P. C. C. or A. I. C. C.

But we are concerned much more with the larger problem and we must not be led away from it by local peculiarities. To face and solve that problem we must develop direct contacts with the peasantry. I think also that we should develop and maintain friendly and coöperative relations with peasant organisations and Congressmen should belong to them in large numbers. But we must avoid the development of any sense of rivalry between the two. The principles we follow are clear enough but the human factor is equally important, and if the latter functions properly, there should be a minimum of trouble and friction.

*June* 28, 1937

## 37

# NOTE ON THE CONSTITUTIONAL IMPASSE*

On April 1st, 1937 Part III of the Act of 1935 was put into operation, and Provincial Autonomy as envisaged in the new Constitution was inaugurated. The parties or groups controlling a majority in the Provincial Assemblies were then entitled to shoulder the responsibilities of government, in terms of the Act, in all the provinces. In six provinces the Congress Assembly Parties were in a clear majority over all other parties; in some provinces they were the largest single party. The six provinces where they were in a clear majority (Madras, U. P., Behar, Bombay, C. P. and Orissa) comprised two-thirds of British India's population. The Congress was thus in a position to undertake, if it so chose, the formation of ministries in these six provinces. In most of the remaining provinces it could have done so by forming an alliance or coalition with another group.

The question of office acceptance and formation of ministries had agitated the Congress for the past two years

* This is a joint note of Narendra Dev, K. T. Shah and Jawaharlal Nehru for the series issued by the National Publications Society.

and a final decision had been repeatedly postponed. After the general elections had brought striking success to the Congress and the inauguration of the new Constitution was imminent, the decision could no longer be delayed. The All India Congress Committee therefore met for this purpose in Delhi in the third week of March 1937 and finally decided to permit acceptance of office in the provinces where the Congress commanded a majority in the legislature, but they made this subject to a condition. Ministries were only to be formed by Congressmen if the leader of the Congress Party in the provincial legislature was satisfied, and was in a position to declare publicly, that the Governor would not use his special powers of interference, or set aside the advice of ministers in regard to their constitutional activities. The All India Convention, consisting of Congress members of the various Provincial Assemblies and members of the All India Congress Committee, accepted this decision of the All India Congress Committee.

In accordance with this direction the leaders of Congress Parties who were invited by Governors to form ministries asked for the necessary assurances, and these not having been given, the leaders expressed their inability to undertake the formation of ministries.

The majority party having refused office, a deadlock ensued in these six provinces, and the Governors appointed ad-interim ministers who had no backing in the legislatures. The legislatures themselves were not summoned as this would have inevitably led to the dismissal of the ad-interim ministries and a sharpening of the impasse.

During the three months that followed many statements were issued on behalf of the Congress as well as of the British Government defending and justifying the position taken up by each. The controversy was often carried on in legal and constitutional terms but, in essence, the conflict went deeper and represented the antagonism between British Imperialism and the desire of the Indian people to be free. By asking for assurances from Governors not to use their special powers of interference, the Congress wanted to develop a convention that the ministers' advice would prevail even as regards these special powers. It wanted a free hand in the provincial government within the limits of the Act.

The Governors' executive powers and functions, according to the Act, are of three kinds :

(i) those to be exercised in the Governor's sole discretion ;

(ii) those in which he is to exercise his individual judgment ; and

(iii) those in which he must act upon the advice of his ministers.

The assurances demanded by the Congress referred to the first two classes. In the first of these the Governor need not even refer to his ministers, if he so chooses, and can take decisions entirely on his own responsibility. In the second class fall certain obligations imposed upon the Governor in which he must exercise his individual judgment, but, before he does so, he is to consult his ministers. Should the advice of the ministers not be acceptable to him, he can dis-

regard it. The list of matters in which the Governor is entitled to exercise his own judgment is formidable and imposing, and it was an appreciation of this fact that led the Congress to ask for assurances to avoid obstruction and continual deadlocks in the government of the province.

It was stated on behalf of the British Government that such assurances could not be given without doing violence to the Act. The Congress leaders stated that, while they were entirely opposed to the Act as a whole, they did not contemplate amendments to the Act by demanding assurances. Such assurances could be given even within the terms of the Act. Where discretion was given to the Governor he could certainly exercise it in favour of the advice of the ministers, and he could give an assurance to this effect. The Governor was nowhere prohibited by the Act from exercising his discretion in accordance with his ministers' advice.

As the controversy took a legal turn, as to whether the assurances demanded could or could not be given under the Act, Mahatma Gandhi, on behalf of the Congress, proposed that the matter be referred to an impartial tribunal for decision. This offer was not accepted by the British Government. Nor was recourse had to Section 310 of the Act, which was framed especially to meet possible difficulties during the transitional period.

As the controversy proceeded there was a slight toning down by interpretations of the original demand for assurances on behalf of the Congress. The British Government also changed their ground by slow degrees and finally took

up the position that, though a definite assurance in terms of the Congress resolution could not be given, the essence of Provincial Autonomy, as envisaged in the new Constitution, was the coöperation of the Governor with his ministers.

The position of the ad-interim ministries was becoming more and more difficult. They were highly unpopular and they had no sanction behind them except the will of the Governor. As they could not face the legislature, the legislature was not summoned in spite of repeated demands from the elected members. Provincial Autonomy seemed to be reduced to a farce. It was obvious that these conditions could not last much longer as the legislatures had to be summoned within six months and the budget had to be passed. It was this deepening crisis which led to the largest advance on the part of the British Government, but this advance was accompanied by a broad hint from the Viceroy that if the Congress majorities persisted in their refusal to accept office, the Constitution would have to be suspended under section 93 of the Act in those provinces where the Congress commanded a majority.

It was to consider this situation that the Working Committee of the Indian National Congress met and on July 7th, 1937 it decided to permit acceptance of cabinet responsibilities. It declared that while the declarations on behalf of the British Government exhibit a desire to make an approach to the Congress demand, they fall short of the assurances asked for in terms of the A. I. C. C. resolution. It stated further that it was unable to subscribe to the doctrine

of partnership propounded in the aforesaid declarations, and that the proper description of the existing relationship between the British Government and the people of India is that of exploiter and exploited, and hence they have a different outlook upon almost everything of vital importance. Nevertheless the Committee felt that the situation created as a result of the circumstances and events that had occurred since the Congress demand was put forward, warranted the belief that it will not be easy for the Governors to use their special powers. The Committee therefore resolved that Congressmen be permitted to accept office where they may be invited thereto. But it added that it wished to make it clear that office was to be accepted and utilised for the purpose of working in accordance with the lines laid down in the Congress election manifesto and to further in every way the Congress policy of combating the new Act on the one hand, and of prosecuting the constructive programme on the other.

Within a few days of this resolution of the Working Committee, the leaders of Congress Parties in the six provinces were invited to form cabinets, and they accepted the invitation. The constitutional deadlock thus ended. Congress cabinets have now been formed in Madras, United Provinces, Bombay, Behar, Central Provinces, and Orissa.

*July* 1937

# 38

# THE DECISION TO ACCEPT OFFICE

## I

Soon after the conclusion of the Working Committee meeting, I was asked by over-eager pressmen for my opinion on the Working Committee resolution on office acceptance. I told them that I could not say anything about it as members of the Working Committee do not discuss its resolutions. And then I added lightly that for a member of the Working Committee a resolution of the Committee must be right. For him, so long as he continued to be such a member, the Working Committee, like the king, could do no wrong.

I feel however that I cannot dispose of this question in this light vein and that I should try to explain the significance of the resolution to my comrades of the Congress. For two or three years now the subject of office acceptance has roused fierce controversy in the country and individuals and groups have debated it and clung stoutly to their respective views. Those views remain much the same, but what lay behind these views? Few, I suppose, objected to office acceptance on principle, and even those who thought in terms of revolutionary changes did not consider that acceptance of office was inevitably and invariably a wrong

step. They, and many with them, feared that acceptance involved a grave risk of our getting involved in petty reformist activities and forgetting for a while the main issue. They feared that the initiative would pass from the masses and our activities would be largely confined to the stuffy and limited sphere of the Council Chamber. It was this risk that induced the Congress, the A. I. C. C. and the Working Committee to emphasise repeatedly that more important work lay outside the legislatures, in contact with the masses. If we remember that and our objective of independence always and work to that end, the risk lessens and we may even utilise the council chamber to this very end.

I have no doubt that the Working Committee resolution passed at Wardha reflects the opinion of the majority of the Congress today. This opinion is in favour of acceptance of office but it is even more strongly and unanimously in favour of the basic Congress policy of fighting the new Constitution and ending it. Acceptance of office may be a phase in our freedom struggle, but to end the Constitution and have a Constituent Assembly is our main objective today as it was yesterday. Acceptance of office does not mean by an iota acceptance of the slave Constitution. It means a fight against the coming of the Federation by all means in our power, inside and outside the legislatures.

All this the Working Committee resolution has emphasised and it has made clear again that we are not going to be partners and coöperators in the imperialist firm. The gulf between the British Empire and us cannot be bridged, our viewpoints and objectives are utterly different. Thus

it is not to work the Constitution in the normal way that we go to the Assemblies or accept office. It is to try to prevent the Federation from materialising, and thereby to stultify the Constitution and prepare the ground for the Constituent Assembly and independence. It is further to strengthen the masses and wherever possible, in the narrow sphere of the Constitution, to give some relief to them. Let this be borne in mind by every Congressman.

The last three months and more have shown that the Congress was not eager for office and the spoils thereof. Office was ours even without our asking for it, if only we could reconcile ourselves to the prospect. We looked upon this question always from the point of view of strengthening the people for the struggle for independence. We hesitated and tried to clear the way for our work and weighed the advantages and disadvantages. There can be no doubt that these three months have made the Congress position clearer and stronger, and if we accept office we do so for the longer purpose in view and we leave it when that purpose can be better served otherwise.

The Working Committee resolution was inevitable under the circumstances and I trust that it will be loyally followed by all Congressmen. But to be loyal to the spirit underlying it, we must carry on our work outside the legislatures with even greater energy. We must not lose our sense of perspective. Real strength even for our work in the legislatures, and much more so for the struggles ahead, comes from outside. This is the significance of this resolution as of previous ones.

We have taken a new step involving new responsibilities and some risks. But if we are true to our objectives and are ever vigilant, we shall overcome those risks and gain strength and power from this step also. Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.

*July* 10, 1937

II

The resolution of the Working Committee giving permission to accept office and the consequent formation of Congress ministries in six provinces has created a new situation. Many Congressmen view this with a measure of apprehension, many others expect great things out of this change. Both these reactions are natural. We have swerved off to some extent from the path we have followed for so long and a feeling of hesitation in treading over strange ground is inevitable. Some fear unknown pitfalls, others look forward to an easy march. But all of us, who have deemed it a privilege to serve our country and our people through the Congress, have loyally accepted the Working Committee decision, and in accordance with the traditions of our great organisation, kept faith with each other.

If tried Congressmen feel hesitant on new ground, what of the masses? What do they think of this new orientation of our policy, what do they expect from the Congress now? Do any of them imagine that our struggle for freedom has ended because Congressmen occupy high offices? Do they think foolishly that Swaraj is at hand? They must be

puzzled to see some of their old comrades who were in prison with them but yesterday, sitting in the seats of the mighty in those imposing structures which have been the citadels of British Imperialism. Red-liveried chaprasis hover about them and the enervating perfume of power surrounds them. What has happened to these comrades of ours, they must wonder, what strange sea-change has transformed the convict of yesterday into the minister of today? Is it that they have forgotten and deserted us, poor starving folk, we who looked to them so hopefully for relief from misery? Or are they going to lead us to a land overflowing with milk and honey, the happy land of our dreams, so different from our present lot?

Both these pictures would be wrong. We have not left them and we are their comrades as of old. Though some of us may sit on chairs of state, the same khadi covers our bodies, the same thoughts fill our minds, the same goal calls to us insistently and drives us to action. But we are yet far from that goal and the power to mould our country's destiny is not ours yet. There is no Swaraj or Congress raj, though Congressmen may be ministers. And yet we have a new opportunity for serving and strengthening the masses and perhaps easing their many burdens a little. But even that service will depend on the attitude of the masses, on their organised strength and on their intelligent appreciation of what is happening.

It is incumbent on us therefore to go to the masses and explain to them what has happened. The Working Committee resolution must be read out to them and all its implications

fully explained. They must understand that while there is this great apparent change on the surface, the old conflict between imperialism and nationalism continues, and in this conflict strength comes to us from them and not from high office. And those of our comrades who are in office today, and who deserve every help and sympathy from us in the arduous and responsible work they have undertaken, will only work effectively if the masses are vigilant and press forward the Congress demands.

I suggest therefore that meetings for this purpose be held all over India, in town and village, on a particular day, Sunday August 1st, when the Working Committee resolution should be read out and explained and, while offering comradely greeting to the Congress ministers, we should pledge ourselves anew to independence and the removal of the poverty of our people. On that day also the Flag salutation ceremony should be solemnly performed everywhere. August 1st is a special and significant day for us, a day long dedicated to India's freedom. On that day seventeen years ago the great Lokamanya passed away, and on that very day India launched the non-coöperation movement and began wielding that weapon which has strengthened and vitalized our people so greatly. It is fitting therefore that this day be suitably celebrated and we should remember the past and we should look to the future with the same determination which has held us for so long.

A change has come over our provincial governments and though this change does not vitally affect the relation of Britain to India, it is right that it should affect all our own

countrymen whether they are in Government service or not. It is time that every Indian came out on India's side and coöperated with the Congress in the high tasks that it has undertaken. I trust that as an earnest of this sympathy and goodwill every Indian, who stands for India's freedom, will wear khadi the livery of our freedom, and will display and honour the National Flag. I trust also that the Police force, which has so long been hostile to our people, will think in terms of India now and not of alien masters, and will seek the coöperation and goodwill of the masses. The Congress ministers, if they mean anything at all mean that the interests of these masses will be dominant.

August 1st should be observed not only in the provinces where there are Congress ministries but in other provinces also. In these other provinces the resolutions to be passed will be suitably altered.

*July* 20, 1937

## 39

## SALARIES OF PUBLIC SERVANTS

The advent of Congress ministries has made the question of reducing salaries of public servants a live issue. We see, on the one hand, Congress ministers taking only a fraction of the salaries of their predecessors and, on the other hand, most other public servants in high offices drawing enormous salaries. Even professors and vice-chancellors and other academic folk measure their love of learning and service to the community by the exorbitant salaries they get. In the Punjab we have seen the remarkable spectacle of the new legislators increasing their daily allowance to a record figure. The two pictures are striking enough and yet perhaps few persons appreciate the real difference. This difference is big enough in degree but it is bigger still in kind.

The Karachi resolution on fundamental rights laid down that: "Expenditure and salaries of civil departments shall be largely reduced. No servant of the State, other than specially employed experts and the like shall be paid above a certain figure, which should not ordinarily exceed Rs. 500 a month."

It will be noted that Rs. 500 is more or less the maximum salary. This does not necessarily mean that ministers or other high officers should invariably get the maximum. The principles underlying the Congress resolution are two: (1) salaries should be in keeping with the poverty of the country

and they should therefore be as low as is compatible with efficiency; (2) salaries should not be a measure of the dignity or importance of the office an individual holds but should be based on his needs.

The first of these principles is generally recognised but the second, I am afraid, is not yet sufficiently appreciated. Sensitive people feel that there is a certain indecency in drawing large salaries out of a poverty-stricken people, as in drawing large dividends out of the labour of ill-paid workers. The real fault and indecency lies in a system which permits and encourages this kind of thing. We have got so used to thinking in terms of measuring our importance and our progress in life in terms of income that it is difficult to think of other terms. And yet this is a false and pernicious standard and where money values prevail too much, men decay. But even in our money age we all know that the social and cultural value of a poor scientist or writer is often far greater than that of a rich businessman or a high official drawing a big salary. A taluqadar or big zamindar has a large income but it is a little difficult to find where his social value comes in; some people doubt if he has the slightest social value.

We must, therefore, get rid of this idea of measuring people by their incomes and salaries. Probably this standard of measurement, if inverted, would be a safer guide for us. The question involves big issues and a refashioning of our social order. As a socialist I would confidently point to the socialist solution of this as of other difficulties. But for the moment we are concerned with the salaries of public servants only.

The Congress wants, in so far as it can, to apply this principle to public salaries. That is to say it wants to reduce them to reasonable limits, more in keeping with Indian conditions, so as to lessen the tremendous gap between the official and the man in the field, and to give back, as much as possible, of the revenue of the country to the masses in the form of social and other services. It wants to end the practice of paying progressively more to the higher officials. The office they hold should not determine the salary but the needs of the individual who holds it. An ideal system would require more or less the same payment for all services and all offices. But under present conditions this is not possible and variations must creep in. Still there is no obvious reason why a minister should be paid more than his secretary, simply because of his office. To some extent this may be occasionally necessary as the minister might have to shoulder additional responsibilities. But the principle we wish to adhere to is that a minister has no business to be paid more than his secretary simply because of his office. This would apply to other offices also. This does not mean that other salaries should also approximate to the maximum fixed, but rather that all salaries should be on a lower scale, the maximum being touched only when obviously necessary.

But there are patent difficulties in the way in suddenly upsetting the present system from top to bottom. Apart from the evil inheritance from the British Government, the social system, the habits of people and many other things come in the way. And we have to face suddenly so many complex problems which demand immediate consideration.

We can therefore only set certain examples before the public to begin with, but this question has a basic importance and must be dealt with fully before long. For the present we have provisionally fixed ministerial and other salaries roughly in accordance with the Karachi resolution. That is the maximum allowed, but this maximum need not be drawn as a matter of course.

The question of allowances is intimately connected with salaries. Certain offices necessitate some appurtenances for the sake of efficiency and rapidity of work. But allowances must not become additions to the salaries, else the whole purpose of having low salaries will be defeated.

While on the one side we want to reduce salaries of the higher officers, we want also to provide for a living wage for all and to raise the standard of living of the masses. How far that is possible under the present system is another matter. The ideal we aim at is not to perpetuate poverty but to abolish it, and to raise the general standard as high as possible, so that everyone may participate in the culture of the age. For this, great political and social changes will be necessary. Meanwhile we shall at least try to reduce the gap between the favoured few and the unfavoured millions.

As soon as opportunity offers itself we shall consider the question of salaries and allowances, in consultation with the Congress ministers, so that we might give effect to the real spirit of the Karachi resolution, and put an end to the notion that the worth of a man or his work is measured by the salary he gets.

*July* 24, 1937

# 40

# THE QUESTION OF LANGUAGE

## I

We have had during recent months a revival of the old controversy between Hindi and Urdu, and high excitement has accompanied it and charges and counter-charges have been flung about. A subject eminently suited for calm and scholarly consideration and academic debate has been dragged down to the level of the market place and communal passions have centred round it. Inevitably, many of the champions who have entered the field of battle have little to do with scholarship or the love of a language for its own sake ; they have been chiefly concerned with Government orders and court procedure. Those who love language as the embodiment of culture, of airy thought caught in the network of words and phrases, of ideas crystallized, of fine shades of meaning, of the music and rhythm that accompany it, of the fascinating history and associations of its words, of the picture of life in all its phases, those to whom a language is dear because of all this and more, wondered at this vulgar argument and kept away from it.

And yet we cannot keep away from it or ignore it, for the question of language is an important one for us. It is

not important because of that cry of the ignorant that India is a babel of tongues with hundreds and hundreds of languages. India, as everyone who looks round him can see, has singularly few languages considering its vast size, and these are intimately allied to each other. India has also one dominant and widespread language which, with its variations, covers a vast area and numbers its votaries by the hundred million. Yet the problem remains and has to be faced.

It has to be faced for the moment because of its communal and political implications. But that is a temporary matter and will pass. The real problem will remain : as to what policy we shall adopt in a scheme of general mass education and the cultural development of the people ; how shall we promote the unity of India and yet preserve the rich diversity of our inheritance ?

The question of language is ever one of great consequence for a people. Almost exactly three hundred years ago Milton, writing from Florence to a friend, emphasized this and said : "Nor is it to be considered of small consequence what language, pure or corrupt, a people has, or what is their customary degree of propriety in speaking it ........for let the words of a country be in part unhandsome and offensive in themselves, in part debased by wear and wrongly uttered, and what do they declare, but, by no light indication, that the inhabitants of that country are an indolent, idly-yawning race, with minds already long prepared for any amount of servility ? On the other hand we have never heard that any empire, any state, did not at least flou-

rish in a middling degree as long as its own liking and care for its language lasted."

## II

A living language is a throbbing, vital thing, ever changing, ever growing and mirroring the people who speak and write it. It has its roots in the masses, though its superstructure may represent the culture of a few. How then can we change it or shape it to our liking by resolutions or orders from above? And yet I find this widely prevalent notion that we can force a language to behave in a particular manner if we only will it so. It is true that under modern conditions with mass education and mass propaganda through the press, printed books, cinema and the radio, a language can be varied much more rapidly than in past times. And yet that variation is but the mirror of the rapid changes taking place among the people who use it. If a language loses touch with the people, it loses its vitality and becomes an artificial, lifeless thing, instead of the thing of life and strength and joy that it should be. Attempts to force the growth of a language in a particular direction are likely to end in distorting it and crushing its spirit.

## III

What should be the policy of the State in regard to language? The Congress has briefly but clearly and definitely stated this in the resolution on Fundamental Rights: "The culture, language and script of the minorities and of the different linguistic areas shall be protected." By this

declaration the Congress is bound and no minority or linguistic group can require a wider assurance. Further the Congress has stated in its constitution, as well as in many resolutions, that while the common language of the country should be Hindustani, the provincial languages should be dominant in their respective areas. A language cannot be imposed by resolution, and the Congress desire to develop a common language and carry on most of our work in the provincial languages would be pious wishes, ignored by the multitude, if they did not fit in with existing conditions and the needs of the situation. We have thus to see how far they so fit in.

## IV

Our great provincial languages are no dialects or vernaculars as the ignorant sometimes call them. They are ancient languages with a rich inheritance, each spoken by many millions of persons, each tied up inextricably with the life and culture and ideas of the masses as well as of the upper classes. It is axiomatic that the masses can only grow educationally and culturally through the medium of their own language. Therefore it is inevitable that we lay stress on the provincial languages and carry on most of our work through them. The use of any other language will result in isolating the educated few from the masses and of retarding the growth of the people. Ever since the Congress took to the use of these provincial languages in carrying on its work, we developed contacts with the masses rapidly and the strength and prestige of the Congress increased all over the country.

The Congress message reached the most distant hamlet and the political consciousness of the masses grew. Our system of education and public work must therefore be based on the provincial languages.

What are these languages? Hindustani, of course, with its principal aspects of Hindi and Urdu, and its various dialects. Then there are Bengali, Marathi and Gujrati, sister languages of Hindi and nearly allied to it. In the South there are Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam. Besides these there are Oriya, Assamese and Sindhi, and Punjabi and Pushtu in the North-West. These dozen languages cover the whole of India, and of these, Hindustani has the widest range and also claims a certain all-India character.

## V

Without infringing in the least on the domain of the provincial languages, we must have a common all-India medium of communication. Some people imagine that English might serve as such, and to some extent English has served as such for our upper classes and for all-India political purposes. But this is manifestly impossible if we think in terms of the masses. We cannot educate millions of people in a totally foreign tongue. English will inevitably remain an important language for us because of our past associations and because of its present importance in the world. It will be the principal medium for us to communicate with the outside world, though I hope it will not be the only medium for this purpose. I think we should cultivate other foreign languages also, such as French, Ger-

man, Russian, Spanish, Italian, Chinese and Japanese. But English cannot develop into an all-India language, known by millions.

The only possible all-India language is Hindustani. Already it is spoken by a hundred and twenty millions and partly understood by scores of millions of others. Even those who do not know it at all at present can learn it far more easily than a foreign language. There are many common words in all the languages of India, but what is far more important is the common cultural background of these languages, the similarity of ideas and the many linguistic affinities. This makes it relatively easy for an Indian to learn another Indian language.

## VI

What is Hindustani? Vaguely we say that this word includes both Hindi and Urdu, as spoken and as written in the two scripts, and we endeavour to strike a golden mean between the two, and call this idea of ours Hindustani. Is this just an idea with no reality for its basis, or is it something more?

There are many variations in Hindustani as spoken and written in various parts of northern and central India. Numerous dialects have arisen. But these are the inevitable consequences of want of education, and with mass education these dialects will tend to disappear and a certain standardisation will set in.

There is the question of script. Devanagari and the Urdu script are utterly different from each other and there

is no possibility of either of them assimilating the other. Therefore wisely we have agreed that both should have full play. This will be an additional burden on those who have to learn both and it will encourage separatism to some extent. But we have to put up with these disadvantages for any other course is not open to us. Both the scripts are part of the genius of our language and around them have gathered not only literatures peculiar to the scripts, but also a wall of sentiment which is solid and irremovable. What the distant future will bring to us I do not know, but for the present both must remain.

The Latin script has been advocated as a solution of some of our linguistic difficulties. It is certainly more efficient than either Hindi or Urdu from the point of view of rapid work. In these days of the type-writer and duplicator and other mechanical devices, the Latin script has great advantages over the Indian scripts which cannot utilise fully these new devices. But in spite of these advantages I do not think there is the slightest chance of the Latin script replacing Devanagari or Urdu. There is the wall of sentiment of course strengthened even more by the fact that the Latin script is associated with our alien rulers. But there are more solid grounds also for its rejection. The scripts are essential parts of our literatures; without them we would be largely cut off from our old inheritance.

It may be possible however to reform our scripts to some extent. We have at present, besides Hindi and Urdu, the Bengali, Marathi and Gujrati scripts, each of these three being very nearly allied to Devanagari. It should be easily

possible to have a common script for these four languages. This need not necessarily be Devanagari, exactly as it is written today, but a slight variation of it. The development of a common script for Hindi, Bengali, Gujrati and Marathi would be a definite gain and would bring the four languages much nearer to each other.

I do not know how far it is possible for the Dravidian languages of the South to fit in with a northern script, or to evolve a common script for themselves. Those who have studied this might enlighten us on this point.

The Urdu script has to remain as it is, though some slight simplification of it might be attempted. It might easily absorb the Sindhi script which is very similar to it.

Thus we ought to have later on two scripts : the composite Devanagari-Bengali-Marathi-Gujrati, and the Urdu, and also, if necessary, a southern script. No attempt must be made to suppress any one of these, unless there is a possibility by general agreement of those concerned to fit in the southern languages with a northern script, which is likely to be Hindi, or a slight variation of it.

## VII

Let us consider Hindustani both as the mother tongue of the north and central India, and as an all-India language. The two aspects are different and must be dealt with separately.

Hindi and Urdu are the two main aspects of this language. Obviously they have the same basis, the same grammar, the same fund of ordinary words to draw upon. They are in fact the same basic language. And yet the

present differences are considerable, and one is said to draw its inspiration from Sanskrit and the other to some extent from Persian. To consider Hindi as the language of the Hindus and Urdu as that of the Muslims is absurd. Urdu, except for its script, is of the very soil of India and has no place outside India. It is even today the home language of large numbers of Hindus in the North.

The coming of Muslim rulers to India brought Persian as a court language and, to the end of the Moghal period, Persian continued to be so used. The language of the people in north and central India continued to be Hindi throughout. Being a living language it absorbed a number of Persian words ; Gujrati and Marathi did likewise. But essentially Hindi remained Hindi. A highly persianised form of Hindi developed round the Imperial courts and this was called *Rekhta.* The word Urdu seems to have come into use during the Moghal period in the camps of the Moghals, but it appears to have been used almost synonymously with Hindi. It did not signify even a variation of Hindi. Right up to the Revolt of 1857, Urdu meant Hindi, except in regard to script. As is well known some of the finest Hindi poets have been Muslims. Till this Revolt, and even for some time after, the usual term applied to the language was Hindi. This did not refer to the script but to the language, the language of Hind. Muslims who wrote in the Urdu script usually called the language Hindi.

It was in the second half of the nineteenth century that the words Hindi and Urdu began to signify something different from each other. This separatism grew. Probably

it was a reflex of the rising national consciousness which first affected the Hindus, who began to lay stress on purer Hindi and the Devanagari script. Nationalism was for them inevitably at the beginning a form of Hindu nationalism. A little later the Muslims slowly developed their form of nationalism, which was Muslim nationalism, and they began to consider Urdu as their own particular preserve. Controversy centred round the scripts and the use of them in courts and public offices. Thus the growing separatism in language and the conflict of scripts was the outcome of the growth of political and national consciousness, which to begin with took a communal turn. As this nationalism became truly national, thinking in terms of India and not in those of a particular community, the desire to stop this separatist tendency in language grew with it, and intelligent people began to lay stress on the innumerable common features of Hindi and Urdu. There was talk of Hindustani not only as the language of northern and central India but as the national language of the whole country. But still, unfortunately, communalism is strong enough in India and so the separatist tendency persists along with the unifying tendency. This separatism in language is bound to disappear with the fuller development of nationalism. It is well to bear this in mind for only then shall we understand what the root cause of the evil is. Scratch a separatist in language and you will invariably find that he is a communalist, and very often a political reactionary.

## VIII

Although the terms Hindi and Urdu were interchangeably used for a long time during the Moghal period, Urdu was applied more to the language of the mixed camps of the Moghals. Round about the court and camp many Persian words were current and these crept into the language. As one moves southwards, away from the centres of Moghal court life, Urdu merges into purer Hindi. Inevitably this influence of the courts affected the towns far more than the rural areas, and the towns of the north far more than the towns of central India.

And this leads us to the real difference between Urdu and Hindi today—Urdu is the language of the towns and Hindi the language of the villages. Hindi is of course spoken also in the towns, but Urdu is almost entirely an urban language. The problem of bringing Urdu and Hindi nearer to each other thus becomes the much vaster problem of bringing the town and the village nearer to each other. Every other way will be a superficial way without lasting effect. Languages change organically when the people who speak them change.

## IX

While Hindi and Urdu of ordinary household speech do not differ much from each other, the gulf between the literary languages has grown in recent years. In written literary productions it is formidable, and this has led some people to believe that some evil-minded persons are the cause of it. That is a foolish fancy, though undoubtedly there are

individuals who take delight in increasing separatist tendencies. But living languages do not function in this way, nor can they be twisted much by a few individuals. We have to look deeper for the causes of this apparent divergence.

This divergence, though unfortunate in itself, is really a sign of healthy growth. Both Hindi and Urdu, after a long period of stagnation, have woken up and are pushing ahead. They are struggling to give expression to new ideas, and leaving the old ruts for new forms of literary expression. The vocabulary of each is poor as far as these new ideas are concerned, but each can draw on a rich source. This source is Sanskrit in the one case and Persian in the other, and hence as soon as we leave the ordinary language of the home or the market place and enter more abstract regions, the divergences grow. Literary societies, jealous of the purity of the language they use, carry this tendency to extreme limits, and then accuse each other of encouraging separatist tendencies. The beam in one's own eye is not seen, the mote in the other's eye is obvious enough.

The immediate result of all this has been to increase the gulf between Hindi and Urdu and sometimes it almost appears that the two are destined to develop into separate languages. And yet this fear is unjustified and there is no reason for alarm. We must welcome the new life that is coursing through both Hindi and Urdu even though it might lead to a temporary widening of the gulf. Hindi and Urdu are both at present inadequate for the proper expression of modern ideas, scientific, political, economic, commercial and sometimes cultural, and they are both trying hard, and

with success, to enrich themselves so as to meet the needs of a modern community. Why should either be jealous of the other? We want our language to be as rich as possible and this will not happen if we try to suppress either Hindi words or Urdu words because we feel that they do not fit in with our own particular backgrounds. We want both and we must accept both. We must realise that the growth of Hindi means the growth of Urdu and *vice versa*. The two will powerfully influence each other and the vocabulary and ideas of each will grow. But each must keep its doors and windows wide open for these words and ideas. Indeed I would like Hindi and Urdu to welcome and absorb words and ideas from foreign languages and make them their own. It is absurd to coin new words from the Sanskrit or Persian for well-known and commonly used words in English or French or other foreign languages.

I have no doubt in my mind that Hindi and Urdu must come nearer to each other, and though they may wear different garbs, will be essentially one language. The forces favouring this unification are too strong to be resisted by individuals. We have nationalism and the widespread desire to have a united India, and this must triumph. But stronger than this is the effect of rapid communications and transport and interchange of ideas and revolutionary changes going on in our political and social spheres. We cannot remain in our narrow grooves when the torrent of world change rushes past us. Education, when it spreads to the masses, will also inevitably produce standardisation and unification.

X

We must not therefore look even upon the separate development of Hindi and Urdu with suspicion. The enthusiast for Urdu should welcome the new spirit that is animating Hindi and the lover of Hindi should equally appreciate the labours of those who seek to advance Urdu. They may work today along parallel lines somewhat separate from each other, but the two will coalesce. Nevertheless, though we tolerate willingly this existing separatism, we must help in the process of this unification. On what must this unity be based? Surely on the masses. The masses must be the common factor between Hindi and Urdu. Most of our present troubles are due to highly artificial literary languages cut off from the masses. When writers write, who do they write for? Every writer must have, consciously or sub-consciously, an audience in his mind, whom he is seeking to influence or convert to his viewpoint. Because of our vast illiteracy, that audience has unhappily been limited, but even so it is big enough and it will grow rapidly. I am no expert in this matter but my own impression is that the average writer in Hindi or Urdu does not seek to take advantage of even the existing audience. He thinks much more of the literary coteries in which he moves, and writes for them in the language that they have come to appreciate. His voice and his word do not reach the much larger public, and if they happen to reach this public, they are not understood. Is it surprising that Hindi and Urdu books have restricted sales? Even our newspapers in Hindi and Urdu barely tap the great reading public because they too generally

use the language of the literary coteries.

Our writers therefore must think in terms of a mass audience and clientèle and must deliberately seek to write for them. This will result automatically in the simplification of language, and the stilted and flowery phrases and constructions, which are always signs of decadence in a language, will give place to words of strength and power. We have not yet fully recovered from the notion that culture and literary attainments are the products and accompaniments of courtly circles. If we think in this way we remain confined in narrow circles and can find no entrance to the hearts and minds of the masses. Culture today must have a wider mass basis, and language, which is one of the embodiment of that culture, must also have that basis.

This approach to the masses is not merely a question of simple words and phrases. It is equally a matter of ideas and of the inner content of those words and phrases. Language which is to make appeal to the masses must deal with the problems of those masses, with their joys and sorrows, their hopes and aspirations. It must represent and mirror the life of the people as a whole and not that of a small group at the top. Then only will it have its roots in the soil and find sustenance from it.

This applies not only to Hindi and Urdu but to all our Indian languages. I know that in all of them these ideas are finding utterance and they are looking more and more towards the masses. This process must be accelerated and our writers should deliberately aim at encouraging it.

It is also desirable, I think, for our languages to culti-

vate contacts with foreign literatures by means of translations of both the old classics and modern books. This will put us in touch with cultural and literary and social movements in other countries and will strengthen our own languages by the infusion of fresh ideas.

I imagine that probably Bengali, of all Indian languages, has gone furthest in developing contacts with the masses. Literary Bengali is not something apart from and far removed from the life of the people of Bengal. The genius of one man, Rabindra Nath Tagore, has bridged that gap between the cultured few and the masses, and today his beautiful songs and poems are heard even in the humblest hut. They have not only added to the wealth of Bengali literature but enriched the life of the people of Bengal, and made of their language a powerful medium of the finest literary expression in the simplest terms. We cannot produce geniuses for the asking but we can all learn from this and shape our own course accordingly. In this connection I should also like to mention Gujrati. I am told that Gandhiji's simple and powerful language has had a great influence on modern Gujrati writing.

## XI

Let us now consider the other aspect of Hindustani as an all-India language, bearing in mind that it is no rival to the great provincial languages and there is no question of its encroaching on them. For the moment let us set aside the question of script, for both scripts must have full play. We cannot of course insist on everyone learning both scripts;

that would be an intolerable burden for the masses. The State should encourage both scripts and leave the persons concerned, or their parents, to choose between the two. Let us therefore consider the content of the language apart from its script.

Apart from its widespread range and dominance over India, Hindustani has certain other advantages as an all-India language. It is relatively easy to learn and its grammar is simple, except for the confusion of its genders. Can we simplify it still further?

We have a remarkably successful experiment to guide us, that of *Basic English*. A number of scholars, after many years labour, have evolved a simplified form of English which is essentially English and indistinguishable from it, and yet which is astonishingly easy to learn. Grammar has almost disappeared except for a few simple rules and the basic vocabulary has been reduced to about 850 words, excluding scientific, technical and commercial terms. This whole vocabulary and grammar can be put down on one sheet of paper and an intelligent person can learn it in two or three weeks. He will require practice of course in the use of the new language.

This experiment must not be confused with the many previous attempts to evolve a common world language—Volapuk, Esperanto, etc. All such languages, though simple, were highly artificial and to learn them was an additional burden. The breath of life did not vitalize them and they could never become the languages of large numbers of people. Basic English, having all their advantages, does not suffer

from this disadvantage, as it is a living language. Those who learn Basic English can not only have a simple and efficient means of communication with others, but they are already on the threshold of Standard English and can proceed further if they so wish.

My enthusiasm for Basic English might lead to the query: Why not have this as an all-India language? No, this cannot be, for the whole genius of this language is alien to our people and we would have to transplant them completely before we can impose this as an all-India language. The practical difficulties would also be far greater than in the case of Hindustani which is already so widely known all over India.

But I think that where we teach English as a foreign tongue, and we shall have to do this on an extensive scale, Basic English should be taught. Only those who wish to make a special study of the language, should proceed to Standard English.

## XII

Can we evolve a *Basic Hindustani* after the fashion of Basic English? I think this is easily possible if our scholars will turn their minds to this end. The grammar should be as simple as possible, almost non-existent, and yet it must not do violence to the existing grammar of the language. The essential thing to be borne in mind is that while this Basic language is complete in itself for the expression of all non-technical ideas, it is yet a stepping stone to the further study of the language. The vocabulary might consist of a thousand words or so, not chosen at random because they are

common words in the Indian languages, but because they form a complete whole and require no extraneous assistance for all ordinary speaking and writing.

Such a Basic Hindustani should be the all-India language, and with a little effort from the State it will spread with extreme rapidity all over the country and will help in bringing about that national unity which we all desire. It will bring Hindi and Urdu closer together and will also help in developing an all-India linguistic unity. On that solid and common foundation even if variations grow or diversions occur, they will not lead to separatism. Those who wish to add to their knowledge of Hindustani can easily do so, those who are content with knowing Basic Hindustani only can yet take part in the larger life of the nation.

I have said previously that we should not object to the development of Hindi or Urdu separately. The new words that come in from either direction will enrich our inheritance, if they are vital, living words forced on us by circumstances or coming up from the masses. But the formation of artificial words with no real sanction behind them has no such significance. To a large extent we have to form artificial words to meet the growing needs of our political, economic, scientific and commercial life. In the formation of such words we should try to avoid duplication and separatism. We should be bold enough, I think, to lift bodily foreign technical words which have become current coin in many parts of the world, and to adopt them as Hindustani words. Indeed I should like them to be adopted by all the Indian languages. This will make it

easier for our people to read technical and scientific works in various languages, Indian and foreign. Any other course will lead to chaos and confusion in the mind of the student who has to grapple with large numbers of technical terms, and who often has to read important books in other languages. An attempt to have a separate and distinct scientific vocabulary is to isolate and stultify our scientific growth and to put an intolerable burden on the teacher and taught alike. The public life and affairs of the world are already closely knit together and form a single whole. We should make it as easy as possible for our people to understand them and take part in them, and for foreigners to understand our public affairs.

Many foreign words can and should thus be taken in, but many technical words will have to be taken from our own language also. It is desirable that linguistic and technical experts should make a list of such words for common use. This will not only bring about uniformity and precision, in matters where variety and vagueness are highly undesirable, but will also prevent the use of absurd phrases and expressions. Our journalist friends have a knack of translating literally foreign words and phrases without caring much for the meaning behind them, and then these loose words become current coin and produce confusion of thought. 'Trade union' has been translated sometimes as *vyapar sangh*, a perfectly literal translation and yet as far removed from the truth as anything could be. But the choicest of the translations has been that of 'Imperial preference.' This was called by an enterprising journalist *shahi pasand*.

## XIII

What should then be the policy of the State in regard to language? The State has to decide this question in regard to its courts and offices, and education.

The official language of each province for affairs of State should be the language of the province. But everywhere Hindustani, as the all-India language, should be officially recognised, and documents in it accepted in both the Devanagari and Urdu scripts. In the Hindustani speaking provinces the two scripts must be officially recognised and it should be open to any person to address a court or an office in either script. The burden of supplying a copy in the other script should not be put upon him. The office or the court may occasionally use either script, but it would be absurd to enforce the rule that everything should be done in both scripts. The script that is mostly used in the area which the court or office serves will become the dominant script of that court or office. But official notifications should be issued in both scripts.

State education must be governed by the rule that it should be given in the language of the student. Thus in each linguistic area the language of that area should be the medium of instruction. But I would go a step further. Wherever there are a sufficient number of people belonging to a linguistic group, even though they might be living in a different linguistic area, they can demand from the State that special provision be made for teaching them in their own language. This would depend of course on such students being easily accessible from a convenient centre, and it would

apply to primary education and, perhaps, if the number were large enough, to secondary education. Thus in Calcutta the medium of instruction would be Bengali. But there are large numbers of people there whose mother tongues are Hindustani, Tamil, Telugu, Gujrati, etc. Each of these groups can claim from the State that their primary schools should be run in their own languages. How far it will be possible to extend this to secondary education, I do not quite know. That would depend on the number of pupils concerned and other factors. These pupils would of course have to learn Bengali, the language of the linguistic area they live in, but this is likely to be done in the early secondary stage and after.

In the Hindustani speaking provinces both Devanagari and Urdu scripts will be taught in the schools, the pupils or their parents choosing between them. In the primary stage only one script should be used but the learning of the other script should be encouraged in the secondary stage.

In the non-Hindustani speaking provinces Basic Hindustani should be taught in the secondary stage, the script being left to the choice of the person concerned.

University education should be in the language of the linguistic area, Hindustani (either script) and a foreign language being compulsory subjects. This complusion need not apply to technical schools and higher technical courses. Provision for teaching foreign languages as well as our classical languages should be made in our secondary schools but the subject should not be compulsory, except for certain courses, or for preparation for the university stage.

Among the provincial languages I have mentioned Pushtu and Punjabi. I think primary education should be given in these, but how far higher education can also be given through them is a doubtful matter requiring consideration, as they are not sufficiently advanced. Probably Hindustani will be the best medium for higher education in these areas.

## XIV

I have, with great presumption, made various suggestions ranging from primary to university education. It will be easy to criticise what I have written and to point out the difficulties in the way, for I am no expert in education or in languages. But my very inexpertness is perhaps in my favour and I can consider the problem from a layman's point of view and a detached outlook. Also I should like to make it clear that I am not discussing in this essay the important and difficult problem of education as a whole. I am only dealing with the language side of it. When we consider the whole subject of education we have to think in terms of the State and the society we are aiming at; we have to train our people to that end; we have to decide what our citizens should be like and what their occupations should be; we have to fit in this education to their life and occupations; we have to produce harmony and equilibrium in their private and social and public life. We shall have to lay far greater stress on technical and scientific training if we are to take our place in the modern world. All this and more we shall have to do, and in doing so we shall have to upset

the present incompetent and inefficient and top-heavy system of education, and build anew on securer foundations.

But for the moment let us confine ourselves to the question of language and arrive at some general agreement in regard to it. I have written this essay with a view to invite consideration of this problem from a wider angle. If we agree to the general principles I have discussed, the application of them in practice will not be difficult. We are not in a position to apply most of these principles today in spite of so-called provincial autonomy. We have no financial resources and our hands are tied up in a variety of ways. But to the extent we can put our principles into practice we should do so.

It may be that there is general agreement in regard to some of the suggestions I have made, and some disagreement in regard to others. Let us at least know where we agree; the points for discussion and debate will then be limited in number and we can consider them separately.

I might add that my frequent references to linguistic areas and the language of the province, necessitate that provincial units should correspond with such language areas.

## XV

To facilitate this consideration I give below some of my main suggestions:

1. Our public work should be carried on and State education should be given in the language of each linguistic area. This language should be the dominant language in that area. These Indian languages to be recognised officially

for this purpose are: Hindustani (both Hindi and Urdu), Bengali, Gujrati, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Oriya, Assamese, Sindhi and, to some extent, Pushtu and Punjabi.

2. In the Hindustani speaking area both Hindi and Urdu, with their scripts, should be officially recognised. Public notifications should be issued in both scripts. Either script might be used by a person in addressing a court or a public office, and he should not be called upon to supply a copy in the other script.

3. The medium of State instruction in the Hindustani area being Hindustani, both scripts will be recognised and used. Each pupil or his parents will make a choice of script. Pupils will not be compelled to learn both scripts but may be encouraged to do so in the secondary stage.

4. Hindustani (both scripts) will be recognised as the all-India language. As such it will be open to any person throughout India to address a court or public office in Hindustani (either script) without any obligation to give a copy in another script or language.

5. An attempt should be made to unify the Devanagari, Bengali, Gujrati and Marathi scripts and to produce a composite script suited to printing, typing and the use of modern mechanical devices.

6. The Sindhi script should be absorbed in the Urdu script, which should be simplified, to the extent that is possible, and suited to printing, typing, etc.

7. The possibility of approximating the southern scripts to Devanagari should be explored. If that is not

considered feasible, then an attempt should be made to have a common script for the southern languages—Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam.

8. It is not possible for us to think in terms of the Latin script for our languages, for the present at least, in spite of various advantages which that script possesses. We must thus have two scripts; the composite Devanagari Bengali—Gujrati—Marathi; and the Urdu—Sindhi; and, if necessary, a script for the southern languages, unless this can be approximated to the first.

9. The tendency for Hindi and Urdu in the Hindustani speaking area to diverge and develop separately need not be viewed with alarm, nor should any obstruction be placed in the development of either. This is to some extent natural as new and more abstruse ideas come into the language. The development of either will enrich the language. There is bound to be an adjustment later on as world forces and nationalism press in this direction, and mass education will bring a measure of standardisation and uniformity.

10. We should lay stress on the language (Hindi, Urdu, as well as the other Indian languages) looking to the masses and speaking in terms of them. Writers should write for the masses in simple language understood by them, and they should deal with problems affecting the masses. Courtly and affected style and flowery phrases should be discouraged and a simple vigorous style developed. Apart from its other advantages, this will also lead to uniformity between Hindi and Urdu.

11. A *Basic Hindustani* should be evolved out of Hindustani on the lines of Basic English. This should be a simple language with very little grammar and a vocabulary of about a thousand words. It must be a complete language, good enough for all ordinary speech and writing, and yet within the framework of Hindustani, and a stepping stone for the further study of that language.

12. Apart from Basic Hindustani, we should fix upon scientific, technical, political and commercial words to be used in Hindustani (both Hindi and Urdu) as well as, if possible, in other Indian languages. Where necessary, these words should be taken from foreign languages and bodily adopted. Lists of other words from our own languages should be made, so that in all technical and such like matters we might have a precise and uniform vocabulary.

13. The policy governing State education should be that education is to be given in the language of the student. In each linguistic area education from the primary to the university stage will be given in the language of the province. Even within a linguistic area, if there are a sufficient number of students whose mother tongue is some other Indian language, they will be entitled to receive primary education in their mother tongue, provided they are easily accessible from a convenient centre. It may also be possible, if the number is large enough, to give them secondary education in the mother tongue as well. But all such students will have to take, as a compulsory subject, the language of the linguistic area they live in.

14. In the non-Hindustani speaking areas, Basic

Hindustani should be taught in the secondary stage, the script being left to the choice of the person concerned.

15. The medium of instruction for university education will be the language of the linguistic area. Hindustani (either script) and a foreign language should be compulsory subjects. This compulsion of learning additional languages need not apply to higher technical courses, though a knowledge of languages is desirable even there.

16. Provision for teaching foreign languages, as well as our classical languages, should be made in our secondary schools but the subjects should not be compulsory, except for certain special courses, or for preparation for the university stage.

17. Translations should be made of a considerable number of classical and modern works in foreign literatures into the Indian languages, so that our languages might develop contacts with the cultural, literary and social movements in other countries, and gain strength thereby.

*July* 25, 1937

## 41

## INDIAN TROOPS TO CHINA

The despatch of Indian troops to Shanghai by the British Government is a matter of the gravest import and concern to India. This has been done in continuation of the old policy of using Indian troops abroad without any reference to the wishes of the Indian people. That policy has been condemned by the Congress which has declared emphatically that India cannot permit her armies and peoples to be exploited to her own disadvantage and for the benefit of British imperialism.

It is stated that Indian troops have been sent to Shanghai to protect Indian interests there. What these Indian interests are few people seem to know and it is manifest that the interest to be protected are British imperial interests. And even if Indian interests have to be protected, it is for the Indian people to decide what steps should be taken. The sending of Indian troops therefore without the consent of the Indian people is thus an affront to India. Though by itself it might be a small matter it is a thin end of the wedge and might lead us to all manner of unforeseen entanglements. It might indeed lead us unwillingly to war.

The Congress has repeatedly warned us of the danger of war and declared its opposition to the participation of

India in any imperialist war. This was no empty warning but a declaration made after full consideration of the grave issues involved. By that declaration and warning the Congress stands. The world is drifting helplessly to a state of continuous conflict. The Spanish struggle has continued for over a year and there is no sign of its ending. The Sino-Japanese war, begun in the modern way without any declaration, but with bombs bringing destruction and death to thousands, may last, it is said, for years. Wars begin but do not end easily. They spread and consume other countries. This is the world prospect before us and the possibility of an international conflagration threatens to overwhelm humanity. How shall we face this crisis of history? Not surely as camp followers of Imperialist Britain, being ordered about to fight her battles and preserve her interests.

In our preoccupations with our provincial governments and our domestic problems, grave as they are, we may not forget this mighty thing that overshadows the world and might upset, in one great sweep, all our schemes and planning. That is the major issue before India, as before all other countries, and in a decision as to how to face it the people of India will have their say and it is their wishes that must count. Congressmen must be vigilant to this end; not to be so is to invite disaster.

Therefore India must protest against this despatch of troops to China. In the far-eastern conflict our sympathies are inevitably with China, and we wish her people success in maintaining their freedom against imperialist aggression. But in this international game we cannot allow our man

power and resources to be used as pawns by others. Today we can protest only, but that protest will have the full strength of the Congress behind it if this policy continues.

*August* 25, 1937

## 42

# ZANZIBAR AND THE BOYCOTT OF CLOVES

For some years past the problem of Indians settled in Zanzibar has been before the country. The British Government of the colony, supported by the Colonial Office in London, has been devising laws and regulations which crush Indian trade and will ruin the Indian community in Zanzibar. Our countrymen there refused to submit tamely to this process of squeezing out, and they protested with all their might. They looked to India for sympathy and help in their trials, and they did not look in vain. The people of India responded to that call and, at innumerable meetings, expressed their solidarity with their countrymen in Zanzibar. The Congress gave emphatic expression to this feeling and passed numerous resolutions in support of the cause of Indians in Zanzibar. Even the Government of India appeared to sympathise and considered the proposed legislation as a menace to Indian interests and a breach of previous agreements. But the wheels of the Imperial Government and the Colonial Office moved on, regardless of Indian interests, and the legislation was passed, with minor variations.

Ruin faces the 15,000 Indians in Zanzibar and they have resolved not to submit to this usurpation of their rights. A month ago they started their campaign of passive resistance against these measures and they are carrying on their peaceful and gallant struggle. They have voluntarily gone out of the export trade in cloves in which they have been traditionally engaged. The Working Committee of the Congress, at its last meeting, called upon the people of India to help their countrymen in every way and demanded an embargo on the entry of cloves into India. Further they asked the people to boycott cloves so long as this problem was not settled to the satisfaction of Indian interests. This was the least that our people could do to help our countrymen abroad in their hour of trial.

The Government of India meanwhile has veered round from its old position and has become an apologist of the Colonial Office and a defender of the new legislation in Zanzibar which creates a clove monopoly. Probably it had to do so because of pressure from the Imperial Government, of which it is a subordinate branch. But it is surprising to find that certain elected members of the Central Assembly should have also forsaken the Zanzibar Indians and helped the Government in opposing the demand for an embargo. The arguments advanced by them showed an astonishing and pro-imperialist bent of mind. Those who oppose India's struggle for freedom, thereby supporting British imperialism in India, usually support this imperialism abroad also, even at the cost of Indian interests.

It is utterly wrong to say that our struggle in Zanzibar

is to protect Indian vested interests as against the interests of the people of the country. The Congress holds by the principle that in every country the interests of the people of that country must be dominant and must have first consideration. We apply that principle to India and therefore we cannot tolerate any foreign interests imposing their will on us. We apply it to other countries also, and we would willingly put an end to Indian interests there if they conflict with those of the people of the country. But we are not prepared to submit to, and we shall fight, any attempt to injure Indian interests for the advancement of British Imperialism. In Zanzibar, it is this imperialism that is functioning and it is in its interests that the changes have been made. An anti-Indian clove monopoly has been established to enrich the British monopolist at the expense of the Indian small trader. The Zanzibar Distillery, which is an imperialist British concern, is in a position to buy from the monopolist Association clove stems at half the rate that would otherwise have been obtainable in a free foreign market.

Secondly, it is notorious that Britain's colonial administration, as that of India, is exceedingly expensive, extravagant and top-heavy. To keep this running and to find money for it, the people are heavily taxed. The burden falls especially on the poor. In many African colonies the iniquitous 'hut-tax' or a 'poll-tax' is imposed on the poorest to enable the administration to pay heavy salaries and allowances to its officials, who are usually Britishers. Sir George Maxwell, a distinguished public servant of Malaya, has recently pointed out the scandal of these expensive and

over-staffed administrations run at the cost of impoverishing the already poor and of stinting the barest expenditure on public works, public health, education and other essential public services. He gives many startling figures from Malaya and Africa. One colony with a total population of 3001 (men, women and children) maintains a heavily paid Governor and Commander-in-Chief and a numerous staff of officials. But we need not cross the seas for such instances; we have remarkable examples in our own country.

Zanzibar has put up with such an expensive over-staffed British administration. Like Topsy, it "growed", fattening on the prosperity of the clove trade, which had been built up by Indian industry. Every boom period was taken advantage of to add to the number or emoluments of the army of administrators. Then came the slump and it was not so easy for the unhappy country to shoulder this heavy burden. Instead of reducing the number of big officials and the amounts paid to them in salaries and allowances, and thus making the administration fit in to some extent with the necessities and realities, fresh sources of revenue, not for public works or education, but to keep the administration running in the old way, were anxiously sought after. Further taxation was out of the question. And so this device of collaring the profits of the clove trade and running the administration with their help. These profits, which would have been spread out over a large number of traders, were diverted, by the creation of a monopoly, to the administrative machine as well as to British imperialist concerns. Recently, a new burden has been undertaken by the Zanzibar Government

for the honour and glory of British Imperialism. The recurring cost of a Naval Coastal Defence Unit, or part of the cost, will fall on Zanzibar.

Thirdly, the political rule of the British over the colonies is perpetuated by this strategy of creating conflict on other issues and of diverting the attention of the Arab and African inhabitants from the fundamental anti-imperialist issue. Anti-Indian feelings are sought to be raised and the real imperialist exploiter hides behind this screen and carries on merrily with his work of exploitation.

This clove monopoly, it is obvious, has little to do with the interests of the African and Arab growers of clove. The monopoly is bound to hurt them in the long run. A monopoly by an independent national State might have some virtue in it; a monopoly by a socialist State would inevitably benefit the growers as they would be the owners and beneficiaries of the monopoly. But a monopoly by an Imperialist Government in a subject colonial country can only benefit that Government and the Imperialism it represents.

The issue is thus quite clear for all who wish to understand it. The Zanzibar Indians are the victims of British imperialist policy, and their cause is the cause of all of us in India. For us it is a national question of grave import and no communal considerations affect it. Yet it is interesting to remember that the Indian merchants in Zanzibar, who are suffering from this new legislation and are fighting against it, are Muslims. Some of the Muslim members of the Central Assembly who have constituted themselves the guardians of Muslim interests, and who voted recently with the

Government and against the interests of Zanzibar Indian Muslims, might well ponder over this fact.

The problem has a larger significance for it affects all Indians overseas as well as the national status of India. India cannot tolerate the humiliation and injury of her children abroad, and when they call to us for succour, can we remain silent? Wherever they live or carry on business, they are subjected to ignominy and discrimination, and constant conflicts arise. Today we cannot give them adequate and direct aid, but the time will come when the long arm of India will reach them and will be strong enough to protect them. But even today we are not so weak as to watch helplessly the ruin of our countrymen.

The result of this brave resistance of Zanzibar Indians will have far-reaching consequences. If they win, they will increase the status of India abroad and all our countrymen overseas will be stronger to face the difficulties that encompass them. If they lose, it is not they only that lose, but India loses, and all her children abroad, wherever they might be, will sink in their helplessness. Zanzibar Indians occupy a strategic position among overseas Indians in the British colonies. They are a strong community which has played and is playing a decisive role in the economic life of the country. It is not easy to ignore them or suppress them, and if we help them, they can win.

What can we do to help them? We had asked for an official embargo on cloves, but the British Government, unhappily supported by some of our own countrymen, has refused to have this. Let us then have an unofficial embargo

and boycott cloves and stop their import into India. This is a big enough weapon to paralyse the clove business of Zanzibar for India is the biggest purchaser and consumer of cloves. Already, I am happy to know, that merchants in Bombay and Calcutta, who deal in the import of cloves, have resolved not to import them in order to help our people in Zanzibar. Already this has had a marked effect in Zanzibar where the price of cloves has fallen greatly and the Government there is gravely embarrassed. We must organise efficiently this unofficial embargo and show to our alien government that the people of India can act effectively, despite its opposition.

The Working Committee of the Congress has given the lead and I appeal to my countrymen to follow it. I appeal to the merchants not to import or deal in cloves. I appeal to all consumers to give up the use of cloves till this struggle ends satisfactorily for us. It is a small sacrifice but the cause for which we work is a big one. And let us remember that meanwhile our countrymen in Zanzibar are bravely carrying on their campaign of passive resistance.

*August* 28, 1937

# 43

## THE ANDAMANS' HUNGER-STRIKE

I do not remember anything in recent years that has exercised the mind and moved the heart of India so much as the fate of the political prisoners in the Andamans consequent on their hunger-strike. The whole of the country has been deeply stirred and all manner of people, even outside the ranks of the politicians, have raised their voices in sympathy for human suffering and in protest against a grievous wrong. Everybody knows that this sympathy is not for violent activity, and most of us do not approve of the weapon of a hunger-strike to right a wrong. And yet there is this enormous, deep and widespread feeling for our countrymen in the Andamans. Almost one can hear the heart of India beating and feel the pulse quickening at the thought of this grim tragedy that is being enacted. It is not so much the individuals that matter. It is as if a limb of the nation was in pain and the whole body suffered for it.

And yet the Government of India has decreed that they are not prepared to give any consideration to the prisoners demands. Surely it would be a difficult task to find another instance where the Government of a country was so alien in thought and feeling and action to the people of that country. Even despots bow to popular will, but not so the Govern-

ment of India under the new Constitution. The gap that separates the people of India from the British Government is unmeasurable and unbridgable. Perhaps even this tragedy that is being enacted before our eyes has served a good purpose if it makes us realise the true nature of this gap and of the illusion of power that the new Constitution is supposed to give us.

The Provincial Governments, whose prisoners are in the Andamans, are powerless in the matter. Many of them, it is well known, have asked for the repatriation of these prisoners. But they ask in vain. This raises important constitutional issues, but more important than this is the human issue, overriding political barriers. The humanity of India has been outraged and the British Government have dared to treat it as of no consequence. But India will remember this challenge and will give her answer.

*August* 29, 1937

## 44

# THE RIGHT PERSPECTIVE

The formation of Congress Ministries in six provinces has brought a breath of fresh air in the turgid and authoritarian atmosphere of India. New hopes have arisen, new visions full of promise float before the eyes of the masses. We breathe more freely for the moment at least. And yet our task is infinitely harder, more complex, and dangers and difficulties beset us at every step. We are apt to be misled by the illusion that we possess power, when the reality of power is not within our grasp. But the responsibility is ours in the eyes of the people and if we cannot discharge this to their satisfaction, if hopes are unfulfilled and visions unrealised, the burden of disillusion will also be ours. The difficulty lies in the inherent contradictions of the situation, in the vastness of India's problems demanding a far-reaching and radical remedy, which it is not in our power to give under present conditions. We have to keep the right perspective always before us, the objectives for which the Congress stands, the independence of India and the ending of the poverty of the people. We have at the same time to labour for smaller ends which bring some immediate relief to the masses. We have to act simultaneously on this double front.

If we are to achieve any success in this great enterprise, we must keep faith with our people, be frank with them, take them into our confidence, and tell them our difficulties and what we can hope to achieve and what we cannot, till greater power comes to us. We must examine the principles on which we stand, the anchor which holds us, for to forget them is to cast ourselves adrift on a sea of pettiness and trivial detail, with no lighthouse to guide us on our path. We dare not grow complacent.

## II

All our activities must therefore be guided by the objective of Indian independence. No Congressman, whether he is a Minister or a village worker, can afford to forget this for then he will lose the right perspective which is essential for all of us. To achieve this independence we have to get rid of the new Constitution, and so the Minister, who functions under this very Constitution, will always think in terms of replacing this by another, framed by the Indian people, through a Constituent Assembly. That thought, though it might not materialise in action for some time, should govern his outlook. The next major step in that direction will come when the attempt is made to thrust Federation on us against our declared will. That attempt has to be combated, in the Assemblies as well as outside, and we shall use all our strength to prevent this Federation from functioning.

Those of us who have to shoulder the burden of directing national policy and giving a lead to our people, have to

think in even wider terms and to look often beyond the frontiers of India. Our own problems have to be seen in relation to international problems, the possibilities of great crises or wars. The Congress has laid down our policy in the event of such crises developing, and if we are to abide by that policy, as we must, we must ever keep it in mind. The recent despatch of Indian troops to Shanghai is a reminder of how our resources are utilised for protecting imperialist interests. This exploitation of India will continue and grow unless we are vigilant. It might land us, almost unawares, in a war, not of our seeking, but in the interests of the very imperialism which we seek to remove from India. Congressmen must therefore not allow themselves to forget the international implications of what happens in India. Our Ministries are not directly concerned with these larger events, but indirectly they may also come in contact with them and might be able to influence them.

III

The Congress has laid repeated stress on Civil Liberty and on the right of free expression of opinion, free association and combination, a free press, and freedom of conscience and religion. We have condemned the use of emergency powers and ordinances and special legislation to oppress the Indian people, and have declared in our programme that we shall take all possible steps to end these powers and legislation. The acceptance of office in the Provinces does not vary this policy, and indeed much has already been done to give effect to it. Political prisoners have been released, the ban on numerous organisations removed,

and press securities have been returned. It is true that something still remains to be done in this respect, but this is not because of any lack of desire to take further steps on the part of Congress Ministries, but because of extraneous difficulties. I trust that it will soon be possible to complete this task and to redeem our pledge in full by the repeal of all repressive and abnormal provincial legislation. Meanwhile the public should remember the peculiar difficulties under which the Congress Ministers have to function, and not be over-eager to cast the blame on them for something for which they are not responsible.

Civil Liberty is not merely for us an airy doctrine or a pious wish, but something which we consider essential for the orderly development and progress of a nation. It is the civilised approach to a problem about which people differ, the non-violent way of dealing with it. To crush a contrary opinion forcibly and allow it no expression, because we dislike it, is essentially of the same genus as cracking the skull of an opponent because we disapprove of him. It does not even possess the virtue of success. The man with the cracked skull might collapse and die, but the suppressed opinion or idea has no such sudden end and it survives and prospers the more it is sought to be crushed with force. History is full of such examples. Long experience has taught us that it is dangerous in the interest of truth to suppress opinions and ideas ; it has further taught us that it is foolish to imagine that we can do so. It is far easier to meet an evil in the open and to defeat it in fair combat in people's minds, than to drive it underground and have

no hold on it or proper approach to it. Evil flourishes far more in the shadows than in the light of day.

But what is good and what is evil may itself be a doubtful matter, and who is then to decide? Governments all over the world are not known to be particularly competent in giving such decisions, and official censors are not an attractive crowd. Yet governments have to shoulder a heavy responsibility and they cannot discuss the philosophy of a question when action is demanded. In our imperfect world we have often to prefer a lesser evil to a greater one.

For us it is not merely a matter of giving effect to a programme to which we have given adherence. Our entire approach to the question must be psychologically different. It cannot be the policeman's approach which has been so characteristic of the British Government in India, the method of force and violence and coercion. Congress Ministries should avoid, as far as possible, all coercive processes and should try to win over their critics by their actions and, where possible, by personal contacts. Even if they fail in converting the critic or the opponent, they will make him innocuous, and the public sympathy, which almost invariably goes to a victim of official action, will no longer be his. They will win the public to their side and thus create an atmosphere which is not favourable to wrong action.

But in spite of this approach and this desire to avoid coercive action, occasions may arise when Congress Ministries cannot avoid taking some such action. No Government can tolerate the preaching of violence and communal strife, and if this unfortunately takes place, it has to be curbed

by having recourse to the coercive processes of the ordinary law. We believe that there should be no police censorship or banning of books and newspapers and the largest freedom should be given to the expression of opinions and ideas. The way we have been cut off from progressive literature from abroad by the policy of the British Government is a public scandal. We must get rid of these bans and censorships and nurture the free soil from which the life of the intellect can grow and the creative faculties can take shape. But still, it must be remembered, that there may be exceptional cases of books and newspapers which are so manifestly of an obscene character or promote violence or communal hatred and conflict, that some action to check them has to be taken.

## IV

A number of political prisoners, convicted for violent activities, have recently been released by the Congress Ministries after long terms in prison. They have been welcomed by the public and by Congressmen, and we have been asked if this welcome did not signify an approval of violence. That question reveals an ignorance of public psychology and of the minds of Congressmen. The public and Congressmen alike welcomed them because of the mantle of long suffering that they bore. How many of them had spent their entire youth in prison, how many had faced death without flinching? They had erred and pursued a wrong path, they had followed a policy injurious to the very cause they sought to serve, but they had paid for it in pain

and torment and by long years in solitary cells. They had come to realise that the old policy of theirs was utterly wrong. And so the public welcomed them and friendly faces greeted them wherever they went. Has this not got a lesson for governments who imagine that by suppressing a number of individuals they solve a problem? They succeed thereby in intensifying that very problem, and public sympathy, which might well have been against the individual's deeds, turns to him because of his suffering.

The problem of the political prisoners in the Andamans is with us today and we see the amazing folly of Government in pursuing a policy which is creating a frenzy of excitement among the public. Thus they intensify the very atmosphere which they seek to remove.

The Congress Ministries have rightly followed a contrary policy because they try to move with public approval, and seek to win over these brave young men, and create an atmosphere favourable to the working of the Congress programme. In that favourable atmosphere even wrong tendencies will wilt and wither away. Everybody of any consequence in Indian politics knows that terrorism is a thing of the past in India. It would have vanished even earlier but for the policy of the British Government in Bengal. Violence is not killed by violence, but by a different approach and by removing the causes which lead to it.

On those comrades of ours, who have been released after one or two decades of prison life, rests a special responsibility to be loyal to Congress policy and to work for the fulfilment of the Congress programme. The foundation

of that policy is non-violence and the noble structure of the Congress has been built on that firm foundation. It is necessary that this should be remembered by all Congressmen, for it is even more important today than it has so far been. Loose talk encouraging violence and communal conflict is especially harmful at the present juncture and it might do grave injury to the Congress cause as well as embarrass the Congress Ministries. We are children no longer in politics; we have grown to man's estate and we have big work ahead, big conflicts to face, difficulties to overcome. Let us face them like men with courage and dignity and discipline. Only through a great organisation, deriving its sanctions from the masses, can we face our problems, and great mass organisations are built up through peaceful methods.

V

The basic problems of India relate to the peasantry and the industrial workers, and of the two the agrarian problem is far the most important. The Congress Ministries have already begun to tackle this, and executive orders have been passed to bring some temporary relief to the masses. Even this little thing has brought joy and hope to our peasants and they are looking forward eagerly to the greater changes to come. There is some danger in this eager expectation of the paradise to come, for there is no immediate paradise in prospect. The Congress Ministries, with the best will in the world, are incapable of changing the social order and the present economic system. They are bound down and restricted in a hundred ways and have to move in a narrow orbit. That

indeed was, and is, a principal reason for our opposition to the new Constitution. We must therefore be perfectly frank with our people and tell them what we can do and what we cannot do under present conditions. That very inability of ours becomes a powerful argument in favour of the vital change which will give us real power.

But meanwhile we have to go as far as we possibly can to give relief to them. We must face this task courageously and not be afraid of vested interests and those who would obstruct us. The real measure of the success of Congress Ministries will be the change in the agrarian laws that they bring about and the relief they give to the peasantry. This change in the laws will come from the Legislature, but the value of that change will be enhanced if the Congress members of the Legislatures keep in close touch with their constituencies and inform the peasantry of their policies. Congress parties in the legislatures should also keep in touch with Congress Committees and with public opinion generally. By this frank approach they will get the friendly coöperation of the public and will be in touch with the realities of the situation. The masses will thus also be trained and disciplined in the democratic method.

A change in the land laws will bring some relief to our peasantry, but our objective is a much bigger one and for that the pre-requisite is the development of the organised strength of the peasantry. Only by their own strength can they ultimately progress or resist the inroads that vested interests might make on them. A boon given from above to a weak peasantry may be taken away later, and even a good law may

have little value because it cannot be enforced. The proper organisation of the peasants in Congress Committees in villages thus becomes essential.

## VI

In regard to the industrial workers, the Congress has not so far developed a detailed programme because the agrarian situation dominates the Indian scene. Some important principles have however been laid down in the Karachi resolution and in the Election Manifesto. Labour's right to form unions and to strike has been recognised and the principle of the Living Wage approved of. The policy recently outlined by the Bombay Government in respect of industrial workers has the general approval of the Working Committee. This policy is by no means a final policy or an ideal one. But it represents what can be attempted and done under present conditions and within a relatively short period of time. I have no doubt that if this programme is given effect to, it will bring relief to labour and, what is even more important, give it organisational strength. The very basis of this programme and policy is the strengthening of workers' organisations. The Bombay Government declare, in their statement on Labour Policy, that "they are convinced that no legislative programme can be a substitute for the organised strength of the working class, and till organisations of workers, run on genuine trade union lines, grow up, in the various fields of employment, no lasting good can accrue. Government are therefore anxious to assist in removing real hindrances in the way of the growth of the organisation and to

promote collective bargaining between the employers and the employees. Means will be devised to discourage victimization of workers for connection with a labour organisation and participation in legitimate trade union activity."

With regard to trade disputes, the Bombay Government propose legislation to ensure that "no reduction in wages or other change in the conditions of employment to the disadvantage of the workers should take place till they have had sufficient time and opportunity for having the facts and merits of the proposed change examined and all avenues of peaceful settlement of the dispute explored, either through the channel of voluntary negotiation, conciliation or arbitration, or by the machinery of the law. A corresponding obligation would rest on the workers in respect of demands on their behalf." This means that before a trade dispute develops into open conflict there must be an intermediate stage of negotiation or arbitration. It does not mean that there is compulsory arbitration ending in an award which is finally binding on all parties whether they accept it or not.

Compulsory arbitration of this latter kind has always been opposed by labour for it strikes at the root of one of their most cherished rights—the right to strike. They also fear, with considerable justification, that in such a compulsory proceeding in a capitalist country, the weight of the State is likely to be cast on the side of the employers. And so they would be tied hand and foot, unable to use the only weapon which they possess and which a century of hard struggle has given them. That is not the present proposal for that would be contrary to the Congress policy of recog-

nising the workers' right to strike. That right to strike is fully maintained, but an intermediate stage is provided for to explore avenues of settlement of the dispute. This policy, I am convinced, will be highly to the advantage of all concerned, and especially of labour. Our labour is weak and disorganised and unable to stand up for its rights. The long record of sporadic strikes is a record of almost continuous failure. It is true that even unsuccessful strikes sometimes strengthen the labour movement, but the reverse is still more true, and the present feeble state of our labour movement bears witness to this. For years past labour has been fighting a constant rearguard action against wage-cuts, almost helpless to prevent them. If some such legislation, as is proposed in Bombay, had been in existence, it would have been far more difficult to reduce wages and labour would have been in a much better position to bargain on equal terms with the employers, with probably a friendly public opinion to back it.

The strike is a powerful weapon, the only real weapon of labour. It has to be cherished and preserved and used in an organised and disciplined way with effect when necessity arises. To use it casually and sporadically is to blunt it and thus weaken labour itself. Behind the strike there must be a strong organisation and public opinion. This organisation seldom develops if there are frequent partial and sporadic strikes which fail.

Organisation therefore is the primary need of labour, and all who wish well for labour must help in the building up of strong trade unions. They must remember that any form of

violence, whether during a strike or at other times, is injurious to labour's interests. It drives the State into the opposing ranks and provokes far greater violence on the part of the State. It disorganises labour and irritates public opinion. In India it sometimes leads to communal violence which diverts attention immediately from labour's demands. Labour, above everything, cannot afford to be communal or to encourage communalism.

The recent strike in Cawnpore had many lessons to teach us. Much was made in the newspapers of the firing that took place there and I was even misreported as having said that I approved of this firing. As a matter of fact I knew nothing of this firing at the time and I said so. Subsequently I found that this firing was a trivial and individual affair of little significance. An individual had fired in a moment of excitement, but had fortunately caused no great injury to anyone. But what is worth noting is that the occasional stone throwing from the crowd was indulged in largely by communal elements who were out for trouble. They did not want a settlement. Even when a settlement was arrived at, these communal elements tried their utmost to upset it and prevent the workers from returning to the mills. Fortunately their influence was not great and the workers' leaders succeeded, after a hard night's work, in explaining the situation to the workers and getting them to resume work. This difficulty would not have arisen if the workers had been properly organised in a trade union.

The lesson is therefore: strengthen the organisation and beware of communalism and violence.

The workers and their leaders know well that the Congress Ministries are friendly to them and wish to help them in every possible way. Circumstances beyond their control may prevent them today from going as far as they would like to. But, for the first time in its history, the workers' movement has friendly Provincial Governments in six provinces, and the chance of remedying some of its ills and developing its strength and organisation. They will injure their own cause by embarrassing these Governments and withholding their coöperation from them.

VII

Questions have arisen as to the attitude of Congress Committees and Congressmen generally towards Congress Ministries and the Provincial Governments where they function. Are they to criticise publicly or only privately or say nothing at all? What should our public activities be now in these six provinces.

It is manifest that the Congress is more important than any ministry. Ministries may come or go, but the Congress goes on till it fulfils its historic mission of achieving national independence for India. That achievement will come, not through Ministries, but through the organised strength of the Indian people acting through the Congress. When that achievement comes in full measure the Congress might well cease to exist. Its task will be done. But till then it is the emblem of our strength and unity and national purpose, and we must strengthen it in every way. That strength comes from day to day service of the masses and by developing their initiative and habits of democratic discussion.

It is patent that for a Congress Committee to condemn a Congress Ministry is both improper and absurd. It is as if one Congress Committee condemned another. The Ministries, being the creation of the Congress, can be ended at any time by the Congress. If they are not good enough, let us end them or mend them. If we are not prepared to do so, then let us put up with them. Therefore condemnation is out of the question. If we think at any time that they ought to go, then we should take the proper steps under our constitution to bring this about.

On the other hand, for Congress Committees and Congressmen to become silent and tongue-tied spectators of the doings of Congress Governments would be equally absurd. Vital subjects, like the agrarian problem, will be considered by the Legislatures, and all of us are, or should be, interested in these. Congress Committees have every right to discuss them and send their suggestions and recommendations and popular demands to the Provincial Congress Committee concerned. That course should prove helpful both to the legislature and the P. C. C. Friendly criticism or suggestion should always be welcome; it is the friendliness and mode of approach that matter. Any attempt to embarrass the Congress Ministries and put difficulties in their way will end in embarrassing ourselves. We are all soldiers in the same cause, comrades in the same great enterprise, and whether we are Ministers or village workers, we should deal with each other in a spirit of coöperation with a desire to help and not to hinder. But we have to be vigilant also and ever alert, and not permit complacency to creep in, deadening our public

activities and gradually crushing the spirit of our movement. It is that spirit that counts and the public activity that results from it, for only that can supply the driving force to carry us forward to our goal, and only on that can we base a structure of democratic freedom. The small gains that may come to us will be of little consequence if they come at the cost of that spirit.

We aim at national independence and a democratic State. Democracy is freedom but it is also discipline, and we must therefore develop both the freedom and the discipline of democracy among our people.

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